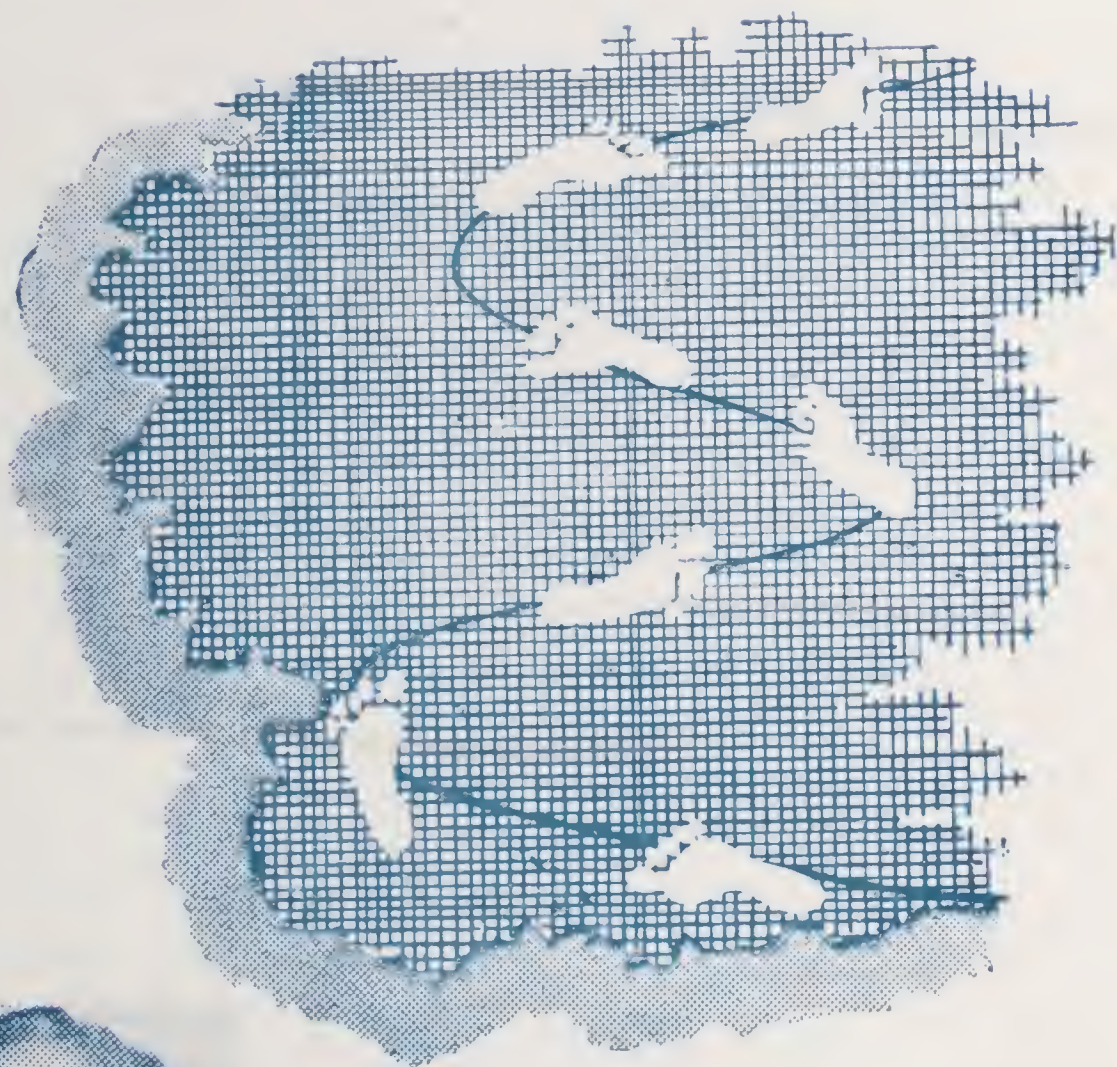


NOT SO STRANGE

An Autobiography



DR. MAR APREM

BOOKS BY Dr. MAR APREM

Biographies

1. Mar Thoma Darmo—A Biography pp. 214, 1974
2. Mar Abimalek Thimotheus-A Biography pp. 282, 1975
3. Mar Abdisho Thondanat pp. 136, 1987
4. Strange But True: An Autobiography pp. 236, 1981
5. Not So Strange pp. 236, 1991

Church History

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9. The Council of Ephesus of 431 pp. 196, 1978
10. Sacraments of the Church of the East pp. 142, 1978
11. Nestorian Theology pp. 183, 1980
12. Nestorian Lectionary and Julian
Calendar pp. 140, 1982
13. Western Missions Among Assyrians pp. 152, 1982
14. A Nestorian Bibliography pp. 128, 1982
15. Indian Christian Who is Who pp. 210, 1983
16. The Chaldean Syrian Church of the East
(ISPCK, Delhi) pp. 64, 1984
17. Good News Festivals in India pp. 224, 1984
18. Indian Christian Directory pp. 264, 1984
19. Mar Aprem, Theologian & Poet pp. 136, 1990

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20. America Revisited pp. 148, 1977
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24. Sydney to Canberra pp. 128, 1989
25. The Assyrians in Iraq pp. 112, 1990
26. Germany via Vienna pp. 140, 1991

(To be continued in Title Page 3)

NOT SO STRANGE

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NOT SO STRANGE

2nd Part of an honest and humorous
autobiography

MAR APREM

1991

NOT SO STRANGE

(English)

Author :

Most Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem

B. D., M. Th., S. T. M., D. Th.

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FOREWORD

By Jonathan E. Sanford

What does a North American Methodist say when introducing the second volume of the autobiography of His Grace, the Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of the Church of the East (Chaldean Syrian Church) in India?

In many ways, I had known Mar Aprem for several years before we were first introduced. I was inclined favourably towards him because I have the very highest regard for his Church people in India.

My wife and I attend a downtown Church in Washington, D. C. (merged United Methodist and United Church of Christ congregation) which immediately adjoins the World Bank. For a number of years, through the initiative of one of our members—a dedicated Indian lady who worked for the Bank and had graduated from that school in her youth—members and friends of our Church have provided aid to poor Indian children attending the Chaldean Syrian High School in Trichur. (As the name suggests, the school is affiliated with Mar Aprem's Church.)

The small monthly stipend the donors provide each child makes the difference who could not otherwise afford to forgo the income the child might earn. As one twelve-year old girl wrote my eldest daughter (her sponsor), "I would have to quit school and take a job. If my young life my education would be over." On their own time, the teachers and administrators at the Trichur school distribute the funds, look after the children's needs, and—together with our Church member—translate from Malayalam the monthly letters the children write to their sponsors. The programme works because of the love these dedicated Indian Christians show for their young pupils. Because of them, I was well disposed towards the Chaldean Syrian Church from the start.

I first actually met Mar Aprem when Carol and I visited India at the turn of the year 1988-89. During our trip, we visited Trichur to see the school, to meet our children, and to strengthen and extend the fabric of our friendships with people in the area. Our friend, Theresa Ghese, the lady who helped start the scholarship programme, knew we were intrigued by the fact that Christians have worshipped in Kerala for as long as Christians have worshipped in most of Europe (and a good 100 years longer than anywhere in the United States). She arranged for us to visit the Metropolitan of the Chaldean Syrian Church in Trichur. I don't remember what we expected, but it was the start of a memorable New Year's Eve.

To make the story short, we had a pleasant talk, he showed us his sitar (lots of enthusiasm, but Ravi Shankar's is safe), and showed us some wonderful ancient

Church documents in his archives.* Then we were off for a drive that evening tracking the supposed footsteps of St. Thomas through the by-ways of rural Kerala. Carol and I still remember with awe the skill and sangfroid of his driver as Mar Aprem's little Ambassador car hurtled down the dark narrow crowded roads (with its little ecclesiastical flag flying up front on its fenders) as we talked about Church history and other less serious topics. We still laugh when we remember the reoccurring litany we heard when, time after time as we asked local people for directions, they told us the particular Church we were seeking was "three kilometers straight ahead, no more" no matter what road we happened to be on at the time. Coming back after an enjoyable evening, Mar Aprem got out of the car somewhere to preach at a crowded midnight service in the open-air auditorium of the ancient Orthodox Syrian Church, the entrance to which was barely visible from the street corner. Very tired, Carol and I went home for a late dinner with our friends and a night's sleep.

The next morning, on New Year's Day, with our friend Theresa, we attended worship services at Mar Aprem's Church in Trichur. The service was beautiful and elegant, with the wonderful ritual of an Orthodox

* I work for one of the world's great research libraries, the Library of Congress, and I know some of the concerns of our preservation people. Mar Aprem has in his library/archives many documents of great historic value, not just to his denomination but to the whole Christian Church and history generally. I respect his correct decision that the scarce resources of his Church should be spent to meet the needs of its current members. Nevertheless, I must make an unsolicited comment that someone somewhere should devote some resources to the preservation (or at least duplication) of the Church's oldest treasures. Otherwise, history will cry.

liturgy. Mar Aprem had a deacon give me a book with an English translation. It boggled my mind to realize we were using the same language that Jesus spoke and an order of service which had been used in India largely in its present form for perhaps a thousand years.

Imagine my surprise, then, when Mar Aprem spoke, in conversation after the service, about "we non-Catholics" and our common religious perspective. This set me to reading. I found that, like the Western Protestants, the Thomas Christians in South India also had to struggle for their independence after Rome tried to absorb them in the 16th century. Also like we Protestants, the Thomas Christians fractured subsequently into a number of denominations which remain separate today. More significantly, I found from reading Mar Aprem's scholarly works that the Church of the East and the main-line Protestant Churches seem to share a number of theological views, most notably (for the present discussion) their concepts regarding the nature of Christ and of his mother Mary.

I do not pretend to be an expert in theology. It seems to me, though, that modern Church scholars might take another look at the Church of the East's teaching in the above two areas. First, it seems to me that they give new historic support for the Protestant claim that the doctrines propounded in the Reformation effected a return to, not a deviation from, the original beliefs of the Church. We Protestants trace our doctrines back to the late European Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. The Church of the East traces its similar views back to the ancient Church fathers and the early Church. Second, it seems to me that the Church of the East's formulation

of certain doctrines might cast new light on some contemporary theological issues.

Mar Aprem argues convincingly, in his book on the Council of Ephesus that—despite some linguistic confusion attributable to problems in the interpretation of ancient Greek—no real difference exists between the concepts of the second person of the Trinity (Christ) taught by the Church of the East and the traditional Western Church. The Nestorian church uses the appellation, “Mary the Mother of Christ,” in its liturgy in preference to the alternative cited earlier. As I understand it, the Nestorian view arose in the 5th century as a counter to the Monophysite view (widely supported at the time) which held that Jesus had but one nature (fully divine) and all his works were those of God. On this basis, the idea that God might have been born as the Son of Mary was suspect theologically. Personally, I find the Nestorian appellation a useful reminder of the traditional Christian belief that Christ had two equal natures, both human and divine. Reiteration of the latter also may be a valuable counter to the neo-Monophysite tendencies, evident in some of our contemporary liturgy and theology, which seem to equate Jesus and the Lord God as though they were interchangeable.

The above has probably run a bit beyond the normal bounds of a foreword. That stimulating New Year’s visit with Mar Aprem cast a lengthy shadow which influenced my subsequent thoughts. The present volume is written in the same modest, low-key style that Mar Aprem uses in personal conversation. He records here his thoughts and insights on the common and the uncommon occurrences of life. The reader may find that, at some later moment,

A comment read in this book may come back to stimulate his thinking in a future situation. The book also has an honest but gentle quality which is characteristic of its author. Not here the "Kiss-and-tell" book; the "Slash-and-burn" account (so common in autobiographies by public figures these days) which attempts to shape the historical record in ways flattering to the author or to put in the worst possible light one's opponents. Mar Aprem suggests in places, for example, that being an archbishop is not a series of unending joys. But he does not dwell on his occasional difficulties and he accepts the people involved with evident humour and grace-filled respect.

So, I commend this book to you. Mar Aprem writes from a special perspective. As a still-young archbishop of a unique Church, he has insights which merit our attention. As an informed observer, knowledgeable about the West but seeing events through Indian eyes, he often gives new meaning to phenomena which otherwise seem quite prosaic to those of us who see with Western eyes. I hope you enjoy the present volume as much as I have enjoyed it. Finally, let me add a word of thanks to Mar Aprem for asking me to write the foreword to his book. Besides forcing me to clarify my views, the writing gave me additional appreciation for his works and for him.

Washington, D. C.

June 1991

INTRODUCTION

According to Arthur Koestler, author of an erudite autobiography *Arrow in the Blue*, people write autobiographies for two main reasons.

“The first may be called ‘The Chronicler’s Urge’. The second may be called the ‘Ecce Homo Motive’..... ‘The Chronicler’s Urge’ expresses the need for the sharing of experience and reality to external events. The ‘Ecce Homo Motive’ expresses the same need with regard to internal events.”

I agree with him that an ideal autobiography should be a synthesis of the two.

In my autobiography “*Strange But True*”, written in 1980, when I completed 40 years of age, there was a promise that a second volume entitled “*Not So Strange*” would be attempted, when I would have completed 65 years of age, to chronicle the events of my life between 40 and 65.

But 2005 A. D. is a long way off from now. Most people are now talking only upto 2000 A. D. and not beyond. One has to be current with the times. 2005 A. D. is indeed far from now. Hence this venture, in between, on completion of 50 years of age. The promised 65th year volume would still be a reality with a slightly different title which befits the 21st century.

Not So Strange is the 38th book and not the 65th as announced. If I live 15 years more and publish two

books on an average per year, the third volume of my autobiography could still be my 65th book as planned. In order to keep up with the two-books-scheme every year, the number of pages in each book has been reduced to between 120 and 130. My 13th book *Strange But True* has 236 pages in it. That was printed in 10 point types. Later, most of my books were in slightly bigger 12 point types to facilitate easy reading for older people. Hence the content of each of my books has been halved. But recently I had to return to 10 point types to save paper.

Why should I write an autobiographical work? Why shouldn't I leave it to my successors to write it, as I had done in writing the biographies of three of my predecessors? I got an answer to this problem when I read recently the following autobiographical note by one of the famous Indians who had become the President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. This philosopher-President, an ex-Oxford Professor, writes his reason for attempting to write about himself.

"No man's story of his own life can fail to be of interest to others, if it is written in sincerity. Even if the stage be small and the role of the participant a minor one, the interactions of chance and circumstance with human desires and ideals that shape the destinies of any individual are of some interest to his fellows. But, of all writing, autobiographical writing is the most delicate. We do not wish to confess our deeds and misdeeds in public. We are inclined to show to the world more of our success than of our setbacks, more of our gains than of our losses. Robert Browning tells us that the meanest of mankind has two sides of his life, one to face the world with and the other to show the woman he loves. We have two sides, one in ordinary life and the other when we write about ourselves for the public. We want to live an imaginary life in other people's ideas of us.

We then direct our efforts to seeming what we are not. Besides, any sensitive man who takes life seriously is somewhat inaccessible to the public."

Professor Radhakrishnan continues:

"If he happens to be a writer, he does not generally reveal himself except through his writings, where he recreates his personal experience by clothing them with general significance. Through his writings, which constitute his main life-work he tries to communicate the vital ideas which have shaped his life.

Dr. A. A. Sandosham, who in his 86th year has settled down in my hometown Trichur, writes in his autobiographical work *Golden wedding anniversary: The Sandoshams* (1931 — 1981) that old age has problems with memory. However, he considers that old age helps us to recall the events of childhood. In p. 82 we read :

"It is a well known medical fact that with advancing years arteriosclerotic changes take place in the blood vessels resulting in some malfunction of the brain. The person's memory for recent events is impaired while at the same time remembrance of events of early life is enhanced. That is why the elderly live in the past and are fond of achievement; at the same time they realise that the younger generation is not aware of it and is unlikely to become acquainted with the details of their attainments unless the story is told."

The learned doctor calls this age 'anecdotalage', as one indulges in telling and re-telling anecdotes from his past. According to him at that age "Those with a flair for writing may well be tempted to resort to recording their reminiscences."

About writing an autobiography Dr. Sandosham states (p. 83)

"An autobiography may be justified even in the absence of great achievements if it is a work of great literary merit. In my case, I have not only failed to achieve anything remarkable but I have too poor a mastery of the language to attempt to achieve literary eminence. I have no desire to leave my footprints (deformed from an attack of poliomyelitis) in the sands of time. Autobiography has been defined as fiction written by someone who knows the facts. An honest account of my life and thoughts may be colourless and flat and an account of my encounters with others may give offence to persons, dead or alive, unnecessarily."

Justifying his work Dr. Sandosham, a polio affected from South India, who later became a Vice Chancellor Malaysia, refers to the advantages of his memoirs in following paragraph: (p. 84)

"Apart from the members of the public, there is, however, one group of people who may be genuinely interested in reading about someone's life. I write about one's near relatives and close friends who have affection for the person and who would like to have a record of his life printed for private circulation. Such memoirs written towards the evening of one's life helps one to live again in memory and walk down Memory Lane from early childhood to senescence."

As I get older, I find it extremely difficult to remember the name of people I met, and details of the events I participated in. Therefore I consider it more reasonable that I publish this second volume without waiting for another 15 years to be at a ripe forgetting age. It is true that 65 is now considered a ripe old age now. Yet, for an untiring

chronicler like me, it will be better to pen them down and once written, to publish them rather than hide them under a bushel, difficult to trace when needed.

The novelist Laurence Durrell mused in his last interview before his death in November 1990. "I feel frightfully *posthumous*," dwelling on the word with perfect comic timing. He elaborated this statement in the following words.

"Last time I really thought I was going to croak. When the doctors said I might have another few years to go, I feel slightly disappointed!" (*Indian Express* magazine, Feb 10, 1991, p. 5)

It is not any premonition that I was going to croak which hastened the writing of this second volume without waiting for the completion of 65 years. It is the chronicler's urge in me.

The pages of my autobiography may not appear to be "fragments of a confession" as that of Dr S. Radhakrishnan. It is an honest attempt to tell about the joy and challenges in the life of a religious leader. Not only achievements and awards, but also failures and disappointments, find their place.

The present work follows the same pattern as of the first part. Nevertheless, a sincere attempt is made to improve the quality as I have grown ten years wiser. It is upto the readers to judge the work of an author, however higher up the ladder the writer may be.

I am grateful to Dr. Jonathan Sanford of the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., who visited me two and a half years ago in Trichur along with his wife, for writing a fitting foreword to this book.

Trichur, Kerala
13 June 1991

Mar Aprem

CHAPTER 1

My Writing Career

I have written 37 books. Is there anything unusual about it? I won't say it is easy to write, proof-read and publish 37 books; but the record of some writers baffles me. It makes me realise how moderate my achievements are.

Barbara Cartland, the romance writer of England, aged 89, has just finished her 530th novel. No surprise that she is in the honours list of the new year 1991, becoming a dame, the female equivalent of a knight. Dame Barbara Cartland has sold more than five hundred million books in England and abroad. Her daughter is Princess Diana's stepmother. Dame Cartland dictates 1000 words a day to her secretaries.

In this connection it is appropriate to quote from the *Guinness Book of World Records*: (GIANT 1988 Revised Edition, p. 204)

Top-Selling Authors

Currently the top-selling authoress is Barbara Cartland with global sales of over 450 million copies for 450 titles in 21 languages. She has averaged 23 titles per year for the last decade.

The all-time sales estimate of books by Erle Stanley Gardner (1889-1970) (US) to Jan. 1, 1986, is 319,034,707 copies in 37 languages. The top-selling woman crime writer has been Dame Agatha Christie (nee Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller), later Lady Mallowan (formerly Mrs. Archibald Christie) (1890-1976). Her 87 crime novels have sold an estimated 300 million copies in 103 languages. *Sleeping Murder* was published posthumously in 1977.

It was announced on March 13, 1953, that 672,058,000 copies of the works of Marshal Josef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, also known as Stalin (1879-1953), had been sold or distributed in 101 languages.

Many have encouraged me to write more books. Mr. Youel A. Baaba, an Assyrian friend living in El Sobrante, California, writes to me on December 11, 1990

"I have been following your activities through the pages of 'Voice of the East' and from the many books that your Grace have authored. I have tried to obtain most of your books, but sometimes it is difficult to keep up with the speed at which you have been writing and publishing. I have always believed that our church leaders should concentrate more of their time in writing and educating their followers. You have done a great job and keep up the good work. With God's help, someday we may read your 100th book."

It is an over-ambitious plan to write 100 books. And to expect that the 100th book would be written early

ough to be read by him, who is older than I am (I do not know by how many years), will be almost suicidal on my part. When I expressed my desire to write my 65th book in my 65th year, I had my hesitation whether it would come true.

If I cross the hurdle, I will have to live up to 80 to write 35 books in the remaining 15 years. I must have a "fluid pen" to keep on manufacturing books undeterred. Barbara Cartland could complete her 530th novel as she turns ninety, it is not impossible. Perhaps, I should start using dictaphones and computers to keep pace with the modern world of competence and competition.

Dr. Hubert Kaufhold of Munich, Germany wrote in *Revens Christianus* (Band 67. 1983, P.223) a review of my book "*Teach Yourself Aramaic*." The German article was translated into English by Deacon Jos Jacob Vengassery.

"This announced grammar for self study of Syriac does not claim to be a scholarly work. At a time, when the use of Syriac in the liturgy of some Churches belonging to the Syrian tradition is on the decline—same is also the case with the Thomas Christians in the home land of the author who is the Metropolitan of the (Nestorian) Church of the East in India—his efforts to popularise the Syriac language earns recognition and support. He begins with explaining the Orthography phonetics and grammar, whereby he deals also with the important vocabulary along with their transliteration and meanings in English. This is followed by New Testament texts for reading together with their English and partly Swedish translations. Besides,

one can familiarise oneself with the Syriac numbers, weekdays and months, the Syriac names for the Books of New Testament, of the Apostles and the Prophets and likewise with selected Syriac texts of biblical phrases. This points to the practical purpose this useful book pursues. At the end there is a detailed glossary of about 1,000 Syriac words for the learner.

The East Syrian types set at the Mar Narsai Press are distinct as seen in the already published liturgical books (for e. g. the three volumes of Hudra, by Mar Thoma Darmo, the predecessor of Mar Aprem in Trichur, 1960-62).

Since 1974 this Press has also published a long list of not so expensive books by Mar Aprem. Among them are two books on two of his predecessors Mar Abimalek Timotheus (died in 1945) and Mar Thoma Dharmo (died in 1969), the two Metropolitans who came from the Near East to India as heads of the Nestorian Church in India. Other books deal with the following: The Nestorian Missions, The History of the Church of the East in India, Council of Ephesus, Nestorian Theology and Sacraments and finally a travelogue (America Revisited, 1977) and an autobiography (Strange But True, 1981). These last two are very interesting books. In these books, with much passion and humour, the author, who was born in Trichur in 1940, was consecrated Bishop in 1968 in Bagdad, narrates his childhood, his studies in India, England and America and has the numerous

journeys he undertook and his manifold Church activities. It is certain that after reading this biography the already announced second part can only be awaited with much eagerness."

A Lutheran scholar in Germany has introduced my books to the German speaking people. In *Theologische Rundschau*, April 1989 (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen) Wolfgang Hage, Professor at Marburg University writes about me and my books in his article "*Literatur Zur Lage und gegenwertigen Situation der Thomaschristi-zeit Indiens*" (pages 169 - 189). On page 169 he has listed my six books including my autobiography *Strange True*. On pages 182 and 183 Dr. W. Hage has given a detailed discussion of my books he mentioned. Thus, though I have not had German translation of books so far I am known to German readers through my two friends Dr. H. Kaufhold of Munich and Dr. W. Hage of Marburg. The first one is a Roman Catholic and the second Protestant, the readers of the two main denominations in Germany are introduced to my humour books or history books.

One day either my humour books or history books will be translated into German language. When my song "Hold the Cross of Calvary" was to be translated, I got two versions, one by Mrs. Brigitte Huber and the second by Dr. Kaufhold. I included Mrs. Huber's translation in my "103 translation" book, because I already had the German translation of Dr. Kaufhold in the book.

I have a notion, right or wrong, that women are good singers especially in their *suprano* voice. In my language, Malayalam Mr. Yesudhas and Mrs. Chitra are equally good. The expert judges who decide the National Awards

do not seem to dare to prefer female voice to a male voice. Therefore at the regional as well as the national level they award separate First Prizes for female and male voices. Nobody, there, blames the authorities for blatant discrimination between male and female. Some of the "Women's lib" activists may condemn this separation of male and female.

The two books of 1980 are interesting in the sense that the first, *Nestorian Theology*, is a part of my doctoral dissertation and hence has considerable relevance for students of theology. The other was *Christeeya Bakthi Ganangal*. It is a collection of 100 devotional songs which I wrote in Malayalam

My books of 1981 reached foreign readers. *Strange But True : An Autobiography* had a foreword by an American friend Streeter Stuart who had taught Spanish and Romance languages in Boston University. It is the first part of my autobiography. I was not sure whether I would be able to recall the events of early childhood and youth after I had grown really old. The second book of that year is *Teach Yourself Aramaic*. This is the language of Jesus. St. Ephrem's Institute in Solna, Sweden encouraged me to write this book and it is used by the people in many countries of the world.

In 1982 my output increased and I wrote three instead of two books. The three books are *Nestorian Lectionary and Julian Calendar* (pages 152), *A Nestorian Bibliography* (pages 128) and the book on the Western Missions which was prepared by me way back when I used to haunt the Lambeth Palace Library, London, in 1961 during my student days in England. The bibliography is a very

useful work to many fresh students wishing to learn more about our Church or Assyrians.

Five books were planned to be published in 1983. Only two came out that year and the remaining three were published the following year. Both the books of 1983 (*Indian Christian Who is Who*, pages 210 and *Bishop's Jokes* pages 108) were of interest to the larger public. Therefore instead of 500 or 1000 copies, I ventured for the first time to print 2000 copies each. Although *Who is Who* is not sold out even after seven years, the *Bishop's Jokes* made fairly good sale. More than half of it was sold out. Most of the remaining copies were given away free. The other book *Indian Christian Who is Who* takes years to be sold out, although many men and women mentioned in that *Who is Who* are dead or have retired from service.

The *Indian Christian Directory*, published in 1984 is one of my best books. I had spent a lot of time gathering information for that work. It would serve the purpose of up-to-date history of Christianity in India. That, too, had not been sold out, as I got busy bringing out new books instead of selling the 2000 copies of this useful one. Some friends asked for a revised edition of this book. But as long as I have more than 1000 copies of the book with me, I will not waste my energy to work on a revised version of the same. This book is the only one which gives information on the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostals and many such denominations in India. Commenting on the ever increasing number of the Christian denominations and their subdivisions, somebody sarcastically remarked that even the Holy Spirit does not know how many Christian Churches there are today.

The National Council of Churches in India with its headquarters in Nagpur wanted to publish small monographs on the history of its member Churches. Mine was selected as the second of the proposed 24 booklets. Thus the *Chaldean Syrian Church of the East* was published by NCCI in collaboration with the I. S. P. C. K., Delhi. It has only 64 pages. It is a summarised version of the historical part of my doctoral dissertation.

The third book published in 1984 was of a different type. *Good News Festivals in India* is a chronicle of the activities of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in India. Dr. Akbar Haqq is a personal friend of mine. As a Church historian I wanted his evangelistic activities to be chronicled for posterity.

In 1985 I wrote three books, but two of them were in my mother tongue, Malayalam. *Through The Footprints of Christ* is a travelogue of my trip to Israel and Rome. I was the conductor of a group of 17 believers, most of them my Church members, who were anxious to see the places in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem, where Jesus was born, brought up and crucified. It was a thrilling experience to most of us. I felt that my mother should read such details. Since she does not know English, I wrote in my mother's tongue, i. e., my mother-tongue, Malayalam.

The second book I wrote that year was a Church History Dictionary in Malayalam. I was one of the two editors. I wrote the section on words beginning with 'A' in full. It was a difficult task. The contributors of the various articles did their work admirably in bringing out this difficult work on leaders of various Christian Churches

There were complaints that there were omissions of some prominent Catholic and Orthodox leaders. We may be able to enlarge on this work, if the present edition is sold out. It has 424 pages. We planned it along the lines of L. Cross (ed) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* which is a much bigger book. We omitted some Christian leaders abroad. We focused on the Indian Church without neglecting the universal Church.

From Bagdad to Chicago is the third book published in 1985. I deliberately wrote it in English, because the people who hosted me in my trip to Bagdad February 1984 and in Sweden, Holland, England and the U. S. A. in September 1984 wanted to read about my visit. It was a "thank you" letter to them.

Dr. K. Gopalan, the then Vice Chancellor of the University of Cochin, in his Foreword to *From Bagdad to Chicago*, wrote :

" I read it at a stretch in one sitting. When I finished reading I felt as though I travelled with the author—Most Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem "From Bagdad to Chicago"—partaking of his experiences and adventures. I could not but re-read some portions, which made me think—and worry—in the context of what is happening today in some parts of India.

.....

 What makes the book eminently readable is perhaps the author's sense of humour and his capacity to

laugh at himself The travelogue *From Bagdad to Chicago* is a valuable addition to the comparatively thin collection of travel literature written in English in Kerala. I have no doubt that this book would be very well received by the English reading public.’

In 1986 I could not bring out any book. Two books were almost ready. They appeared only in 1987. The first one was *Behold the Cross of Calvary* in 103 languages. I wrote this song in 3 languages: Malayalam, Syriac and English. Then I got my friends to translate it into 100 languages. The credit should go to the nearly 100 translators of the book. My friend Rev. Dr. Samuel Bhajjan should be congratulated for translating into four languages namely Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Persian. Friends from abroad helped me, with translations to Polish, Swedish, Danish, Russian, Chinese, Swahili and many such languages whose pronunciation is difficult. The names of more than two dozen foreign languages were not known to me when I started working on it.

Writing a foreword to my book *Behold the Cross of Calvary* Dr. Leonard Henderson, an organist in London with experience for half a century, remarks:

‘In making reference to his musical ability Mar Aprem is being modest, but I am sure the zest which he exerts to his labours will ultimately predominate and be known and acclaimed world wide.’

Although so far my musical amusements and avocation are not yet “acclaimed world-wide,” Leonard Henderson

had the privilege of seeing me play the sitar in 1988 in London, not in the Royal Albert Hall, but in the dining hall of my Assyrian friend, Eshaya Chemmani.

In 1987 another book *Mar Abdisho Thondanat*, (pages 136) the biography of one of my predecessors who died in November 1990, was published. This time it was released in Melbourne, Australia by the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church in Bagdad, who was on a visit to Melbourne at that time. The foreword to that was written by the late Rev. Fr. K. C. Chacko, who was Pro - Vice Chancellor of Cochin and Calicut universities.

In 1988, *Sermons from the Gospels*, Vol I, (pages 208) was published. It was about time I wrote some sermons. After travelogues, biographies etc, I wrote a book worthy of a preacher. A German pastor Dr. Karl Heinz Kuhlman wrote a foreword to that book.

Along with that book another travelogue, *The Australian Assyrians*, (pages 132) was published.

My 30th book *Laugh with the Bishop*, (pages 95) was published by the St. Paul Publications. Bombay. They condensed the book, omitting 56 of the 200 jokes. *Laugh with the Bishop* is well edited and has a good appearance. 1000 copies were printed and the first edition was sold out within two years. The reprint will appear in May 1991. It has a brief but brilliant foreword written by Professor Sukumar Azhikode, former pro-Vice chancellor of the University of Calicut in Kerala. As several foreign friends have started laughing by looking at the attractive title I have a "hunch" that there is going to be at least one or two international editions in England and USA, and perhaps some translations for this harmless humour book.

When the Better Yourself Books in Bombay published my second work on humour, *Laugh with the Bishop*, they added the following blurb on the back cover.

“Here is a collection of hilarious jokes, most of which have to do with the whims, fancies and foibles of bishops. Compiled by Dr. Mar Aprem, himself a bishop, these jokes are sure to make you laugh to your heart’s content without having to tickle your ribs! *Laugh with the bishop*, written in a breezy racy style, makes for delightful reading. So come, one and all, and laugh with and at the bishop!

Professor Sukumar Azhikode, the eminent litterateur in Malayalam, who was pro-Vice Chancellor in the University of Calicut (not Calcutta), wrote a foreword to that book: (pp. 5,6)

“A pontifical joke is regarded almost an impossibility. “Pontifical” suggests something overweighty, pompous and dogmatic, while a joke is light and amusing. How can these co-exist?

But they do co-exist very cordially. *Laugh with the Bishop* by Dr. Mar Aprem proves it very convincingly. It further refutes the accusation made by Oscar Wilde that the humour of Bishops is stale and that the Bishop goes on saying, at the age of 80, the jokes which he heard at the age of 18. Another humourist overdid even Wilde in his wild flight of fancy: “If Adam were to visit a Bishopric now, the only thing he would recognize would be the jokes.”

This is education for the soul, not mere fun. The poor-Bishop has compiled generously in this lovely volume jokes which enable you to laugh even in the rare company of the Devil. This is preparation for life. Mar Aprem's jokes do not create sombre silence, but gaily laughter. They run the gamut of sentiments from the sacred to even profane.

Vintage-jokes, all !

In 1989 I struggled to complete my travelogue *Belgium and Holland via U. K. and U. S. A.* Since I completed my journey in 1988 I wanted the travelogue to appear in that year itself. I failed to catch up owing to my many other responsibilities.

Sydney to Canberra was my 32nd book. Since I had to go to Sydney on our Church business, I stopped for some time being, writing the travelogue of 1988. As soon as I returned in April 1989, I completed both the travelogues and brought it out one after another.

Colour photographs were printed for the first time in travelogues. It is attractive but expensive and hence not affordable for me. When I paid Rs. 800 for the black and white photos (16 photos in 8 pages) in the book *To Belgium and Holland via UK and Holland*, the cost for 8 pages in colour in *Sydney to Canberra* was Rs. 5000. The difference is formidable and therefore my readers could see only my black face in my travelogues.

Dr. Joseph Kolengadan, retired professor of English at St. Joseph's College, Trichinopoly, writes in his foreword to *Sydney to Canberra*.

‘‘Mar Aprem’s *Sydney to Canberra*, then, is not a sightseeing pleasure trip but the Metropolitan’s pastoral visit of his scattered flock, as well as on-the-spot observation and study of sister Churches in their evangelising endeavours. Nevertheless, true to his already internationally established reputation for never failing sense of humour, going through his book is a hilarious experience, no question of mere ecclesiastical rigmarole. Perusal of *Sydney to Canberra* will train the readers to ‘get more smilage out of their lives.’

Dr. Mar Aprem fits in well in the wake of Erasmus, the wittiest, and at the same time, the wisest medieval scholar, who in his Socratic sagacity could afford to compose a treatise in Praise of Folly!’

In 1990 I brought out *Mar Aprem, Theologian & Poet*. It is not about me as readers suspected. It is about the original Mar Aprem who lived during 306-373 A. D. Even I do not know much about this great scholar-poet-theologian. Hence I studied the history and the works of St. Aprem or Ephrem. I did it as a text book for the correspondence course of St. Ephrem’s Ecumenical Research Institute, Kottayam. I printed a portrait of St. Aprem which I got at the Syriac Symposium at Louvain, Belgium in 1988.

The Assyrians in Iraq was a report of my visit to Bagdad and Mosul in March 1990. Hon’ble V. V. Raghavan, Minister for Agriculture, Kerala government, who released the book, admitted that though he had known me for some years then, he never knew that I was an author.

emphasized the relevance of that book in the situation of the Gulf war. Actually this book came out of the press in June before Iraq's occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

The 35th book was the second volume of *Sermons on the Gospels*. I had planned to publish it soon after the first volume came out in 1988. But travels and long travelogues delayed the work on the 33 sermons contained in the second volume. Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph, New Testament scholar, remarked in his Foreword to the book:

"My joy is doubled, a Church historian of eminence has turned his attention to discover and to unravel the power of the Word of God. Very often historians are concerned with skeletons and bare facts of history. But in this present volume, facts are given meaning, and meaning is given a focus".

The Christian Literature Society, Madras, came forward to publish my 36th book. Rev. Dr. T. Manandan Francis, who was known to me personally during my years at Bangalore in 1964-66, is the General Secretary of this leading Christian publishing house. He was a lecturer in Tamil language when I was studying for a B.A. degree in the United Theological College, Bangalore. When I placed my manuscript of *Laugh To Live* at his table, he said, "Bishop, I know that you are a joker. We accept your MS without reading it". My reply was, "No, you should read it, before you say you will publish it".

I was reminded of the story of the daughter of a preacher bragging about her Daddy's qualifications that he could preach without reading, the notes. But the daughter of another preacher outsmarted her by claiming, "My Daddy could preach even without thinking".

The book could not be released before Christmas as was expected. When serious matters come up for printing, the press authorities do not take the work on a joke book seriously. Now a joke book is a serious matter. The first book is not proposed to be reprinted. The second one will not be reprinted until May 91. And the fourth book *Holy Humour* is not ready for the Press. The third one is to appear soon to keep my friends and enemies, especially, in good humour.

Writing a Foreword to my 36th book *Laugh To Health* Mr. P. Thomas, a celebrated author in English, remarks:

"Mar Aprem's jokes are wholesome and clean and free from malice, bitterness and hurtful sting. What makes us laugh is not the folly or the ignorance of individuals or communities, but the oddity of juxtapositions for which no one in particular is to blame. And all people can appreciate these jokes without distinctions of class, caste, creed, colour, age or sex.

This slender volume, as mentioned by the author in his preface, is a companion volume to his two previous books of jokes. Mar Aprem was once a columnist to the *Weekly Kaalam* of the editorial board of which I was then a member, and his column of jokes were highly appreciated by the readers of that journal."

In the Foreword to my latest book, the 37th one, *Germany Via Vienna* Mr. Joseph Kallukaren, former Ambassador of India to North Korea and later Tunisia, writes :

"I read through Dr. Mar Aprem's short travelogue, spiced with subtle humour, with delight and enriched myself by its simple heart-warming descriptions of the lives of fellow-humans elsewhere in the world. But the book is not just that; as the Metropolitan himself had explained elsewhere: "These are not mere travelogues. Church history of today is recorded through the descriptions of the happenings in the Church inside and outside."

I also write articles every month for the *Voice of the East* in both English and Malayalam. I have plans to write for other national and international journals too. I have made up my mind to re-write whenever I find time. I have made it a point to read more voraciously to realise the poor quality of my writing which should deter me from churning out more mediocre books.

At the instance of my well wishers I have desired to place emphasis on quality instead of quantity. Only by editing and re-writing does a writer gain repute. In the last decade considerable improvement in proof reading has been evinced by myself and my publisher.

Discretion forbids me to cry up the simple, readable style of my own writing. Nevertheless, my readers abroad, whose mother tongue is not English, write to me that they understand my books.

My books do not have a large circulation. Although the first two books had a print-run of thousand copies each in the first edition, I decided to halve it for the later books. Recently I have reverted to 1000 copies. Although I get orders for my books from the U. S. A., Canada, Australia, England, Sweden, Germany, Iraq, Iran and Syria, the total number of copies does not run high.

Two of my books have had a second edition. *Mar Abimalek Timotheus* had a Malayalam edition in Trichur and an Assyrian edition in Chicago. I am indebted to Deacon G. S. Benjamin of Chicago, who was instrumental in introducing me to the ordinary Assyrians who could not read English. When I was in Bagdad and Mosul in March 1990 I was asked by the Assyrians to send my books on the *Assyrian Fathers* and *Council of Ephesus* to them to be translated into the Assyrian (Syriac) language.

The book *Nestorian Missions* was reprinted by Mar Narsai Press. The price of the book was enhanced from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10. The cost of paper and printing has become prohibitive. This book is fortunate in having an American edition by Orbis Books, New York. It was not a success in America, as I never visited America during those years and there was nobody to promote the sales of the book. Moreover the same book (Indian edition) was available at a cheaper price.

The first book *Mar Thoma Darmo* was translated into Malayalam by one of our priests. He also translated half of the jokes printed in my book *Bishop's Jokes*. It was published by *Deepika Book House*, Kottayam under the title *Holy Jokes* instead of the original title *Bishop's*

res. The question whether the Bishops are holy or jokes are holy or which of the two is holier is a debatable issue.

All the books I have written so far in English have been done without any remuneration. For the Malayalam book, however, I was paid an honorarium of Rs. 500 by the Theological Literature Committee of Kerala as they do in the case of every book they commission. In 1990 the book was reprinted and I was paid Rs. 1,600 as royalty on the revised edition. Writing is financially profitable to some, but in my case I have just got back what I paid as tuition to the Christian Writer's institute to learn to write.

Articles in periodicals are usually paid for in the West. But in India one cannot expect remuneration unless the writer is well known and the periodical is prosperous. When I received Rs. 75 from the *Malayala Manorama* daily for my article on Christmas in December 1977, I was more than delighted, because it was the first time I had ever got paid for writing articles.

I was pleasantly surprised, eleven years later when the same newspaper paid me Rs. 250 for an article I wrote for Christmas. Rupee is cheaper now.

The South Asia Religious News (SAR News) in Delhi appointed me as one of its reporters. This entitles me to a Press pass and an opportunity to continue to write making use of the knowledge I acquired during the Christian journalism course. The remuneration is one rupee per line which means less than Rs. 200 per year for 200 lines contained in the 15 or so news despatches

which I may be able to write, type and despatch within 24 hours of the happening. For a person of my responsibilities such a task is not easy. Nevertheless, such a discipline is useful to keep me struggle to be prompt. At present the remuneration is enhanced. We get Rs. 2½ per line now.

Writers in magazines and newspapers do not get paid enough, although the position now is much better than what it was until recently. A freelance journalist Subash K. Jha dwells on this point in the *Indian Express* magazine. (February 10, 1991, P. 3)

“The disparity in the pay between in-house writers and outside contributors is unreasonable and staggering..... It was a piece of advice that returned to the front-burner of my thoughts recently, when I realised publishing house was paying its staffers a five-figure salary. And what do you think I was getting for my regular entertainment column? The princely sum of Rs. 250 (only) Wow!”

The newspapers usually do not encourage freelancers. But the same time all the important papers require the services of the freelancers to fill their columns, especially Sunday Supplements. S. K. Jha, who is not as famous a columnist as Khushwant Singh, writes:

“In reality the assault on one’s self esteem is the single most excruciating hurdle in the sticky profession. Barring a handful of privileged contributors who are in the enviable position of laying down terms and conditions, the rest of the gypsy breed is treated with polite contempt.”

Readers may ask what a man of religion has to do with Journalism. The answer to that is found in the statement of the late Pope John Paul I, who some years ago told an interviewer: "If I had'nt been a bishop, I would have wanted to be a journalist". Commenting on a reported statement "Time" magazine, in its issue of 11 September, 1978, remarked: "Throughout his time the new Pope has been a man of words, written and spoken, in sermons and interviews in dozens of languages and several books. The samples below reveal a man with profound conservative instincts but a light touch and a sense of humour. They also show that despite a clerical career John Paul I has wide cultural interests". We wish more bishops were better speakers and writers and had a light touch and a sense of humour. If so, many sermons and addresses in Church assemblies and synodical conferences would be less dry.

The internationally-known Indo-Anglian writer R.K. Narayan (who became more popular through the TV serialisation of his Malgudi stories), says that he writes about a thousand words in two hours. The next day he spends two hours to correct the same. The corrected manuscript goes out for typing. After reading the typed script he prepares the third draft which is the final.

It is nice to remind me often that good quality literature is produced only if I make a serious effort to write and re-write. I know that I often fail to put this resolution into practice. Nevertheless, we should preach good principles as long as we are convinced that they are good principles. Let us struggle to put them into practice. Present failures should not discourage us. We should

strive to improve the quality and attempt to attain precision and perfection as we write more and more, using the tools and skills required for such a drill and discipline.

After the war began in the Gulf in January 1991 the sales of some books have suddenly soared in America. Not only secular books such as "*Rape of Kuwait*," whose millions of copies have been already sold out, but also biblical books authored by preachers and prophets of doom have shot up to the million mark.

Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis is at the top of the best selling list. The author, Dr. John Walvoord, Chancellor of the Dallas Theological Seminary, is predicting that "the Middle East will be the scene of the final great war." This book was originally written in 1974, but revised and re-released in Dec 1990.

One and a half million copies are being printed by the publishers, as the copies have been sold out, according to a report from New York dated Feb 6. Another doomsday book published by the same publisher, Zondervan of Michigan is the *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Mr. Hal Lindsey.

Publishers know how to sell and make money even at the time of war. My book *The Assyrians in Iraq* written and published between the hanging of the Iranian born British journalist Bazoft, accused of spying for Israel, and the Kuwait Crisis of August 2, can be of interest if the publisher attempts to exploit the public by giving catchy and current titles such as *Christians and Saddam Hussein* or *Armageddon and Assyrians*.

In 1983, *Sobornost* (produced in England and circulated internationally among people interested in Eastern Churches) published an article entitled "The Syrian Churches: Some Recent Books From India." This survey of books emanating from India on Eastern Churches, Dr. Sebastian Brock of Oxford chose to give a lengthy survey of my books. His comments about "sheer enthusiasm" has boosted my speed of writing. I consider his generous comments as a mark of encouragement to a younger brother (Dr. Brock is two years older than I) to write more on Eastern Churches, a field in which he himself has excelled especially through his translations and studies on Saint Ephrem, my namesake. Since *Sobornost* does not reach most of my readers I may be excused for reproducing such a lengthy quotation in my autobiography. (Vol. 5, No. 2)

For sheer enthusiasm in the publication of books on the Syriac heritage no one can rival the Rt. Revd. Dr. Mar Aprem (George Mookan), Metropolitan of the Church of the East in India, who has both written and published, at the Mar Narsai Press at Trichur, an impressive number of works over the last few years. These began with Biographies of his two predecessors as Metropolitans, *Mar Abimalek Timotheus*, who died in 1945 (Trichur 1975), and *Mar Thoma Darmo*, who died in 1969 (Trichur 1974). The story of these two Middle Eastern bishops in their adopted Indian home makes truly fascinating reading. In a further volume, *Strange But True* (Trivandrum 1981) (sub titled 'An honest and humorous autobiography of the youngest Indian Archbishop)

Mar Aprem describes his own career to date, in part very ordinary, in part extraordinary. These three volumes written with a disarming ingenueness, offer to the western reader a rare glimpse of the everyday joys, trials and tribulations of oriental prelates.

The wider background of the history of the Church of the East in India will be found in Mar Aprem's *The Chaldean Syrian Church in India* (Trichur 1977), most of which is concerned with the course of events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Among other works by Mar Aprem special mention should be made of *The Council of Ephesus of 431* (Trichur 1978), which originated as a dissertation at Serampore College. The interest of this study lies in the fact that the Church of the East does not recognise this council, and so Mar Aprem's account not surprisingly makes a number of serious criticisms of both the conduct and the conclusions of the council. At the end Mar Aprem offers some reflections on the place of this particular Council in the modern ecumenical dialogue.

Designed for a more general readership are his *The Nestorian Fathers* (Trichur 1976), *Nestorian Missions* (Trichur 1976), *Sacraments of the Church of the East* (Trichur 1978), and *Nestorian Theology* (Trichur 1980). Recently announced titles include *Western Missions Among Assyrians* and a *Nestorian Bibliography*, neither of which I have yet seen.....

One cannot but admire Mar Aprem's energy in his efforts to make his Church with its rich history and traditions better known to the English-reading public."

Writing English by an Indian like me is imperfect. Perhaps still worse is the spoken English.

There is an interesting story about the English as pronounced by Indians in different regions. Queen Victoria took over the administration of India from the British East India Company in 1857. She declared herself as the Empress of India. Calcutta was the capital. There were celebrations of the event in Calcutta, the British Empire was extending its horizon that there be sunshine all the time somewhere in the empire. People stood up and sang the English National Anthem "God save the Queen" at the conclusion of the public meeting. The Bengali people pronounce 's' as 'sh'. When the British officers heard the Bengali people sing "God save the Queen," they were alarmed at the danger of such a request to God at every public function in the capital. Finally Queen Victoria ordered the capital to be shifted to Delhi from Calcutta where the menace of 'sh' pronunciation was minimum.

The book reviews appearing in some newspapers have encouraged me to carry on with my determination to become an accomplished author. Prof. K. M. Mathew reviewed my autobiography *Strange But True* in *Pravara*, the century-old Malayalam daily, writing in English, had this to say :

The autobiography of Mar Aprem, the head of the Church of the East in India, is indeed a beautiful

piece of literature. Mar Aprem through this book, makes available to the reading public an honest, humorous and interesting account of his varied life throwing light on the historical, social and political background of his memorable experiences.

The author has highlighted in this book the appreciable record of his immense achievements, exciting experiences and wide contact in and out of the country,.....

The facts well presented in a lucid style give the glimpses of a highly strange life and make fine reading. The book comments on the strange but true experiences the author had in the different fields of life. The book is highly valuable to the students of Church history as a source of information."

General review appeared in prominent daily newspapers in Malayalam language such as *Deepika*, *Malayala Manorama*, *Mathruboomi*, and *Express*. The reviews in English language publications also appeared making it possible for the English reading public to have a peep into my books which are not promoted widely, but restricted to a very limited circle. The following three examples provide the comments which appeared in a secular, an ecumenical and a foreign periodical.

Southern Chronicle published from Kottayam is a secular periodical. In 1986 Mr. Mathew Philip in a book review on *From Bagdad to Chicago* wrote a lengthy review. An excerpt is reproduced below :

‘‘He has written not only on subjects of his religious vocation and interests, but he has also attempted to put across in several of his books, evidence of discursive scholarship, be it as a biographer, a chronicler of events or as resourceful interpreter of human values. His efforts as travel writer places him among the very few worthies we have in this line in Kerala. His autobiographical work, with the caption ‘‘Strange but True’’ is a source material, both as a travelogue as also a subtle peep into his life and doings. The author does not feel shy detailing even some of the awkward moments in his itinerary when he was the subject matter of ridicule or negligence. What has impressed me most in this book is the manifest candour and sense of humour evinced by him even when he was in a tight corner.

The author’s primary purpose in undertaking most of his trips abroad was not for the purpose of a holiday or diversion. As a Churchman, he was an emissary of an institutional frame-work, and he had definite assignments to keep such as attending conferences, symposiums etc.

An ecumenical publication, *National Christian Council* view in May 1986 published a review of the same travelogue mentioned above. Rev. Dr. Godwin Singh, one of the secretaries of the National Council Churches in India (now he is secretary to Christian Conference of Asia) wrote : (pp. 323-24)

‘‘This small book is the twenty-third one in the long series of books penned down in the style of the illustrious metropolitan of the Church of the

East and with whose earlier works the readers are already familiar. The author has modestly entitled it 'travelogue' but it is definitely more than just a descriptive information book. Even though it is a first hand account of the author's recent foreign trips, yet it conveys a good deal about the Church of the East, its inner tensions, life, hopes and aspirations and is permeated with a sense of optimism in spite of grim divisions, war and threats to world peace. The author claims to have been inspired to write this book due to acclaim he received for earlier 'travel' books. The book can be justifiably classed in its right in the field of Church history. It is a modern Church history on an ancient Church. Up-to-date and accurate information can be gleaned about the Church of the East from the pages of the book."

The Anglican Catholic published in England included a review written by John Herwood in its Vol 17, No. 58, 1987, pp. 44, 45. Referring to my mention of the mass massacre of the Assyrians in 1917 during the First World War, the reviewer comments:

"It is a sad story but Mar Aprem does us a service of recounting it in popular and simple form. There are also some light-hearted moments in his little book. One of the American Presbyterian missionaries who, like others, thought he had found in the Assyrians the 'protestants of the east', because they did not know 'what more artful contrivance Satan could have invented, as a substitute for pure religion of the Gospel, than he had furnished in the fasts of the oriental churches.'"

About my book of 103 translations of my song *Behold the Cross of Calvary*, the same reviewer has this to say:

“Mar Aprem’s second work is more difficult to assess. It comprises a short and modest introduction followed by a hymn of his own composition in one hundred and three different languages. Most of the translations were the willing work of his friends and colleagues in every part of the world and from several religious traditions. It is certainly a labour of love and typical of its author, a prelate of great humility, humour and candour”.

He does not exaggerate when he says that my books were bought out “surprisingly cheaply, though in the case of English, at least, not without errors.” Let me hope this book will defy that description.

As I had never been to the U. S. S. R. I had no friends or contacts in the land behind the Iron Curtain. It was how I came in touch with Professor Konstantine Levich Matveyev who lives in Moscow. Ethnically he is Assyrian. There are almost fifty thousand Assyrians in the U. S. S. R. Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia in the U. S. R., has an Assyrian Society. The President of the Society, Dr. Thamraz Ivanov, commenced correspondence with me recently.

Professor Matveyev is the Russian form of what we call Mathai in Malayalam as well as in Assyrian and Hebrew is English. I should caution my readers that Mathai with a double ‘t’ is English and with a single ‘t’ is Hebrew!

Whenever I receive books or clippings from articles written by Professor Matveyev, I examine them trying to decipher one or two alphabets I know. I even wrote a Book Review of one of his books which he had written in Russian, reading all the English words in the footnotes, text and especially in the Bibliography. I have heard of people producing book reviews within a day without digesting the whole book but just reading the contents page (ofcourse the title page too) as well as the index for one or two topics or words.

Friendship between us grew through the books we exchanged. He read my various books, as he knew English well. He wrote to me to say that I am not only a theologist (he means theologian) but a real scholar. My joke book made him giggle and laugh at me and with me. Then was my suggestion that he would mention it to some in the U. S. S. R. to translate it into the Russian language. Now I have a letter from him saying that the translation work is over. It is now with the Publisher. How fast the Russians are in publishing! The letter reproduced below *in toto* speaks for itself.

28-2-1991

Moscow
U. S. S. R.

Your Grace ! Mar Aprem !

I'd like to inform you, that my son—Ashur and I finished the translation of your 2 books—"Laugh with the Bishop" and "Bishop's Jokes", into Russian and united them into one book under one title : "Laugh with the Bishop." We kept all the material of your 2 books, including the introduction and the foreword and gave our introduction to the book about the history of the Eastern Christianity

India. We transferred our translation to "Politizdat"—
Political Publishing House"—the best one in the USSR.

When the book is published, we would like to invite you
to the Soviet Union for the representation of the Book
to the reader's Conference and are ready to do the same,
then we would come to India.

At the same time we would like to inform you and your
Cousin, that we have founded the first Academy in the
Soviet Union and in the world—Academy of history and
Culture of Assyria and the Assyrians in the Pedagogical
Society in Russia.

We would like to open the divisions of it in different
countries and in India.

There are 6 faculties in the Academy: 1) history 2) culture
3) theology 4) sports 5) Foreign languages (including
Arabic and Malayalam) 6) medicine.

Honourable President is the world known healer Juna
Jata in Vile and the President and the founder is Prof.
K. Matveyev. Now we are looking for international
teachers throughout the world including you and your
Cousin in India.

My son and I are happy to inform you that we have
finished a new book "Ahiqar the Sage: the folk-tales
of the Assyrian—216 folk-stories (2 Vols, 536 pages).

We send them to you as a present.

Awaiting your reply,

I remain yours, Prof. K. Matveyev.

When I travel in Russia after the book is published,
I will always carry a copy with me. I do not know Russian
language. Whenever I travel without an interpreter I can
show this book to the people I meet and make them laugh.

In Berlin a Professor of the Free University, Dr. Klaus J. Dippmann, wrote to me asking to contribute an article for the publication, *Minoritas*. I wrote an article "The Thomas Christians and the Caste Problems" and it appeared in the first issue of *Minoritas* (Series A. Vol 1-1985 No. 1). This was done as a publication of the International Mionology Faculty. I wonder whether even the people in Berlin know what I. M. F. stands for. At any rate it was an opportunity for me to write an article in a publication which includes some German and some English articles. The German speaking scholars will have occasion to see my article (pages 171-176).

There was another German friend, a Russian immigrated to Germany, who requested me to write an article on architecture of the Churches in Kerala. He even wanted to know my account number to transfer to it the remuneration for writing this article. But it was a busy time that I could not find any time to sit and write down the article. Now about six years later, I feel like writing to him enquiring whether I could still write for his publication and if so whether he wanted the same topic for me to write on or change to any other relevant topic. It is very difficult to meet deadlines, not only in the case of writing articles, but also in case of replying letters, especially during Christmas season when many friends write at one and the same time.

Sometimes I feel the Julian Calendar which I observe gives me some breathing space because my Christmas comes only on 7 January while those who observe the Gregorian calendar celebrate it 13 days earlier. Some greeting cards are sent to me only on 7 January. Even after getting Christmas cards in two instalments, on 25

December and 7 January, I fail to respond to all. I must thank Pope Gregory XIII for staring at the stars and learning astronomy, who in October 1582 devised a new reckoning calling 5 October as 15 October. The difference of ten days at the beginning of the Gregorian Calendar has three more days added to it in last four centuries. After another four centuries the difference will be sixteen instead of the present thirteen. The Christmas of the Eastern Churches will be on January 10 instead of January 7 observed at present. The Russians are with us. There are at least 100 million Orthodox Christians today who observe January 7 as Christmas.

In the lengthy quotation from *Sobornost* I am not sure the word my Oxford friend Dr. Sebastian Brock had used is ingenuousness or ingeniousness. I wonder whether it is my typist's error, as I am not able to trace the original printed copy of *Sobornost*.

The different shades of meaning of these two words given in *Roget's Thesaurus* are reproduced below for the benefit of my readers who may be perplexed which of these similar words one can use and when. The word *ingenuousness* comes under artlessness (pp. 204 & 205).

703. ARTLESSNESS:-N. artlessness, unsophistication, simplicity, innocence, candor, sincerity, singleness of purpose, honesty.

rough diamond, matter-of-fact man; enfant terrible (F.).

V. be artless, think aloud; speak one's mind; be free with one, call a spade a spade; tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Adj. artless, natural, pure, confiding, simple, plain, unsophisticated, unaffected, naive; sincere, frank, open,

candid, ingenuous, guileless; unsuspicious, honest, childlike; innocent. straightforward, aboveboard; single-minded.

Matter-of-fact, plain-spoken, outspoken; blunt, downright, direct, unflattering, unvarnished.

Adv. In plain words (or English); without mincing the matter.

The other word ingeniousness have two main meanings, original and skillful.

"515. *IMAGINATION*.-N. imagination, originality, invention; fancy. inspiration.

Ideality, idealism; romanticism, utopianism, castle-building, dreaming; frenzy, rhapsody, ecstasy, reverie, daydream.

conception; flight of fancy; creation of the brain; imagery; word painting.

fantasy, conceit; figment, myth; romance. extravaganza, dream, vision; shadow, chimera, phantasm, illusion, phantom, fancy, whim, vagary; bugbear, nightmare; flying Dutchman, great sea serpent, man in the moon, castle in the air, castle in Spain, Utopia, fairyland; land of Prester John;

Creative works: work of fiction, etc. (novel), 594. poetry, etc., 597; drama, etc., 599; music, etc., 415 painting, sculpture, architecture; art.

idealist, romanticist, visionary, romancer, daydreamer, dreamer, castle-builder; creative artist.

V. *Imagine*, fancy, conceive; idealize, realize; dream, dream of; indulge in reverie; fancy (or represent, picture, figure) to oneself.

create, originate, devise, invent, make up, coin, fabricate; improvise.

Adj. imaginative, original, inventive, creative, productive. extravagant, romantic, high-flown, flighty, superfluous; unreal; unsubstantial.

ideal; intellectual, impracticable, imaginary, visionary, utopian, quixotic.

fanciful; fantastical; fictitious; fabulous, legendary, mythic or mythical, mythological; chimerical; whimsical; airy, fairylike.

698. *SKILL*, -N. skill, skillfulness, address, dexterity, adroitness, expertness, proficiency competence, craft; facility, knack, trick, sleight; mastery, excellence, height of hand, etc. (deception), 545. accomplishment, requirement. attainment; art, science; finish, technique.

worldly wisdom, knowledge of the world, savoir-faire (F.); tact; mother wit, discretion, Finesse; management.

cleverness, talent, ability, ingenuity, capacity, talents, faculty, endowment, forte, turn, gift, genius, intelligence, sharpness, readiness, aptness, aptitude, resourcefulness; ability, capability, qualification.

expert, adept, etc., 700.

masterpiece, masterwork, chef-d'oeuvre (F.).

V. be skillful, excel in, be master of; have a turn for, take advantage of, make the most of, profit by, make a hit, make a virtue of necessity, make hay while the sun shines.

Adj. skillful, dexterous, adroit, expert, apt, handy, slick, deft, ready, smart, proficient, good at, at home in, master of, conversant with; masterly, crack (colloq), rickrack (slang), accomplished.

experienced, practiced, skilled, up in, in practice, competent, efficient, qualified, capable, fitted, fit for, trained, initiated, sophisticated, prepared, primed, finished,

clever, able, ingenious, felicitous, gifted, talented, resourceful, inventive; shrewd, sharp, cunning; neat-handed, fine-fingered; nimble-fingered, ambidextrous, sure-footed.

technical, artistic, scientific, workmanlike, business-like, statesmanlike.

Adv. skillfully, artistically, with skill, with fine technique, with consummate skill; like a machine."

After my reader decides whether ingenuousness is correct in this context or ingeniousness is correct, look at the adjective disarming ingenuousness, if you are not already confused of the meaning to the extent of swearing not to refer to a Thesaurus in your lifetime.

CHAPTER 2

My Trips Abroad

I am not a constant traveller. My average is less than once a year. After I became a Bishop in Bagdad in September, I returned to India in October. I stayed in India till my American trip in 1977. The second and third trips were to Thailand, one for a conference in Pattaya, Thailand and the other for the Syriac Symposium in Germany. These three were mentioned in the first part of my autobiography.

In July 1983 I had an opportunity to attend the International Conference of Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam. It was a novel experience for me as there were Christian leaders under one roof. This trip to Europe brought me the shock of my life when my friend the Rev. G. David, Vicar General of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, seated next to me in the flight, died following a heart attack. As my friend was struggling for his life I was Dr. Michael John of Madras, sitting in the row in front of me. It was a non-stop flight from Bombay to Paris. There was no way to get him the "intensive care" available in a hospital. He died pulling my hand, looking at me and uttering nothing.

It was a surprise to me when I received an invitation from the Society for Oriental Canon Law to read a paper at a Conference in Oct 1983. The University of Freiburg

in Germany was the venue. During the Conference in Amsterdam in July the delegates were not allowed to visit any other place. we were provided with group concession tickets which would not allow the delegates to travel on different dates.

The Oriental Canon Law Conference gave me the freedom to make my travel plans. The university would pay the cost. Therefore I made my own travel arrangements. I bought a Eurail pass which would permit me to travel day and night for two weeks in train. It is very cheap for those who have plenty of time to spare. I attended all the five days of the Canon Law Conference. This reduced my opportunities to make full use of the Eurail pass. After the Conference I travelled to Sweden and met my friend Dr. Bertil Persson of St. Ephrem's Institute, Solna, Sweden. The Assyrian friends in Stockholm also met me.

My deacon, Jose Vengassery, was studying in Heidelberg University in Germany. I visited him. I went to Switzerland and met Mr. Ferine who was President of the Leprosy Relief Work based in Berne, Switzerland. They were helping our Mar Timotheus Health & Leprosy Centre in Thattamangalam, 75 Kms away from Trichur. I am the Director of this leprosy hospital and the brief visit to this donor agency was very fruitful.

Ignatius Konikara from our Church, working in the University of Calicut, Kerala was completing his work for Ph. D. in Microbiology. It was a surprise for him to see me in Zurich. He took me to the area where the big banks are operating. That is where the black money of smugglers, black marketeers and the like are dumped.

the numbered accounts are there. The public never sees whose money it is.

was before the Bofors scandal which shook not the high and mighty in Indian politics, but many ordinary people who have no idea where the commission of the Bofors deal is deposited.

went to England and conducted a service for the Christians. I visited my sister Susheela & family in London.

In Feb. 1984 our Church decided to summon a Synod of bishops in our headquarters in Bagdad. The Iran-Iraq war was going on. Therefore it was difficult to get visas. The Iraq Embassy in Delhi had to obtain clearance from Bagdad on each visa application. I got delayed in Bagdad for two weeks.

In the same year in September I had a trip to Holland to attend the Syriac Symposium. Before the Conference I went to Sweden. It was a great joy for me to meet many Christians in Johnkoping and conduct a Qurbana for the Christians. This service on September 8 was held in a Lutheran Church. I spoke for a few minutes during the memorial service at the Immanuel Church in Stockholm.

The poem penned by an Assyrian deacon (Sarkes Paulos) and sung there after the Assyrian service is reproduced below to cite an example of the love of Christians to compose beautiful poems. The translation from the Syriac to English was done by the same deacon. For the sake of brevity, given below is only the first three stanzas of this six-stanza song in Syriac language.

A

You are welcome oh our Matran
 Christ had sent you for our help
 The hope is upto you oh our Protector
 Absolve our sins and be our liberator

B

Kahna (priest) our father oh Mar Aprem
 Hold out your right hand and keep us up
 Give your command that may everybody will understand
 Who will not obey you will profane him by your mouth

C

Ye Mar Aprem as mediator
 Encounter the principals today
 To quit the garment of insistence and blame
 Let them gather the sheeps in one shed.

I visited England and the U. S. A after the Syriac Symposium. In the U. S. A. I conducted service in Chicago and also assisted Patriarch Mar Addai at a service in California. It afforded me an opportunity to meet my sister Leela and family in Jefferson City, Missouri and brother Addison and family in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Many interesting events of these two trips of 1984 are covered in my book *From Bagdad to Chicago*.

In May 1985 I took a group of Christians from Trichur, mostly our Church members, on a pilgrimage to the holy

places where Jesus was born, brought up and buried. Our trip took us not only to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee and Tel Aviv, but also to Rome. Since most of the team members were mature people older than myself I was looking forward to a trouble-free trip as far as discipline was concerned.

My role was that of a conductor, which meant a free ticket. When I reached Tel Aviv airport I tasted the difficulty of being a leader. The bus to transport us was not seen. We complained and telephoned. Then only we knew that the tour operators had understood that we were arriving the following day. This is the trouble often. We reached at 12-30 a. m. after midnight of a Sunday. Technically it was Monday morning 12.30. So when we sent the message they planned to send a bus only on Monday night.

My people began to persuade me to hire taxis to go to the hotel in Jerusalem. It would cost a huge amount, a sizable chunk of our precious foreign exchange. Some of our group were millionaires but without foreign exchange, in effect they too were as poor as we. I resisted their plans for an immediate transfer to the hotel in Jerusalem from Tel Aviv airport and promised them a little of coca cola to quench their thirst. That would not satisfy the tired passengers. Some of them were travelling abroad for the first time.

Finally I explained my predicament to the Tourism authorities in the airport. Then a bus came and parked near from us. I demanded that our travel operator should come to the airport as we could not find the bus. Finally the operator arrived and showed us the bus.

As soon as we reached the hotel in Jerusalem, one member of the team requested me to get a nurse to give insulin injection, he being a diabetic patient. Oh, boy, I did not know where to find such a facility in a foreign land. Moreover, there was our foreign exchange scarcity. We could not afford to be sick. We had no medical insurance abroad. We could not afford to die in a foreign country either. Funeral would be expensive.

I remembered Moses the man who lived 3,300 years ago. I wondered how he managed to lead such a large crowd of people for 40 years in the wilderness. I comforted myself with the thought that I had to lead these people only for two weeks. I read recently a religious joke. The Israeli premier told President Bush that he was late for a meeting as he was talking to Moses. President Bush expressed his wish to talk to Moses. When Moses was contacted on the phone he refused to talk to Bush. Moses said that the last time when a Bush talked to him, he had to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

During our stay in Rome we had an opportunity to meet Pope John Paul II. It was a public audience on a Wednesday. Being a Bishop I had the privilege of being seated just in front of the Pope. It was a pleasant surprise for me when His Holiness the Pope read out a special word of welcome mentioning my name. The whole audience clapped when the Indian team, though seated some rows behind me, stood up with me as the Pope read out the words of welcome.

“ I wish to greet the representatives of the Church of the East in India, led by their Archbishop His Grace Mar Ephrem. I would hope that our

meeting today would join us more closely as we walk together along the path towards Christian unity."

The Vatican Radio which broadcast the Pope's speech wanted to interview me in the Malayalam programme. I was asked to write down my speech. When I was about to read it, the interviewer, Mr. Koshy Parappat, told me to have a question and answer session instead of reading my manuscript. But when we conversed it took 20 minutes instead of ten minutes as planned. So he had to broadcast it on two days.

It was indeed a privilege to visit Vatican Radio station. Although I had been to Radio stations in India, America and Australia, Vatican Radio is a special one. It was built by Guglielmo Marconi himself, the inventor of radio. The initial work was done in 1929. It was inaugurated on 12 February 1931 at 5.30 in the afternoon. The first talk was in Latin by Pope Pius XI. The first Director of Vatican Radio was a Jesuit Father Giuseppe Gianfranceschi, a physicist and Mathematician who was the Director of the Academy of Science.

Today Vatican Radio, which had completed 60 years service, broadcasts to five continents. Thirty four languages are used including Malayalam. There are 14 hours of liturgy in various languages and 16 hours of musical programmes out of a total 242 hours every week.

The annual budget of Vatican Radio is about 25 million US dollars. The estimated audience of this religious broadcast is around seven to eight million. Among the 430 staff members there are seventy priests.

Fr. Pasquale Borgomeo is the present Director-General. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Vatican Radio he said:

“Vatican Radio is the Radio of the Holy Father. It demands the spirit of service and professional attitude. From the heart of the church to the world, faithful to God on the path of humanity.”

In 1986 I did not travel outside India. But in 1987 I had an invitation from our Church at Melbourne in Australia. Since I had never been in Australia I had no idea about the climate of the country. Thinking that it was like Europe, I chose August for my trip. When I reached Melbourne the temperature was something like 15 or 16 degrees centegrade. Later I realised that the summer would be Christmas time. They do not understand white Christmas (snow for Xmas) which the Europeans or Americans often experience. My account of this trip is recorded in my book *Australian Assyrians*.

In 1988 I had a tour of about five weeks in England, U. S. A., Belgium and Holland. I went to attend the Syriac Symposium held at Louvain University of Belgium. I had carried my *sitar* during this trip. It was a new experience for me to carry a coffin-like wooden box wherein this musical instrument was kept. A lot of interesting experiences were recorded in the travelogue on this 1988 trip.

My second visit to Australia was in 1989. The main purpose was to give evidence in the Supreme Court in Sydney in our Church case. As a Church historian, answering questions was not difficult. At the same time

the first time I was appearing in a court. Therefore I was not very happy. I was interviewed twice on television in this connection.

In 1990 I had two trips. The first one in March was to attend the Synod of our Church held in Bagdad. My book *The Assyrians in Iraq* depicts Iraq as I saw it in 1990. I dealt with the reconstruction going on after the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, which I observed on my trip.

My second trip was to Vienna and Germany. That was my first visit. The details of this trip can be found in my book *Germany Via Vienna*. Thus I made 13 trips in 14 years and (1977-1990) that is one trip making it an average of one per year.

I am not an expert in making friends. K. P. S. Menon states in his autobiography that he believes in the Chinese proverb:

In clothes the new are best
In friends the old are best.

I wonder whether my readers agree with this. My opinion is that it depends upon the friends. New or old could be better and more intimate friends than

Media we did not move about much at the time of childhood. Now things are changing. When the war broke out in Kuwait, those most affected were the people of Kerala. Not only the relatives of the Keralites in Kuwait but also the relatives of the Keralites in the

U.S.A. cried, because those Keralites who immigrated to America went to Saudi Arabia with the US army to liberate Kuwait. Now we too are almost like Americans moving in all directions from the land of their origin.

In his book *The Moving American*, George W. Pierson, a historian from Yale University, speaks of some Americans who moved so much to the extent that they lost touch with the land of their origin. The children of my two sisters and two brothers living abroad (one sister and family in Rugby in England and the other three in the U.S.A.) do not speak our mother tongue, although they understand some words here and there spoken to them by their parents. In the book just mentioned above Pierson proves his point by quoting from a poem "I wish I could remember" by Stephan Leacock. (p. 9)

I wish I could remember
The house where I was born
And the little window where perhaps
The sun peeped in at morn.

But father can't remember
And mother can't recall
Where they lived in that December-
If it was a house at all.

It may have been a boarding house
Or family hotel,
A flat or else a tenement,
'Tis very hard to tell.

Not only shifting residence, but also travelling from place to place has become recently a favourite pastime

people in India. Often, how difficult it is to get in a flight in the Indian Airlines, especially in the --Cochin route. How crowded the trains and the buses these days! How could one get inside a bus? More difficult it is to get out of a bus. Our Highways are not crowded with cars as in America, because most of us in India do not own an automobile.

Perhaps some day what the South American statesman once spoke of the Americans would come true of India too. He said: "If God were suddenly to call the roll at judgement He would surprise two-thirds of the Indian population on the road like ants."

However, in recent times a laziness has captured me and I am afraid to travel. It is not old age. The accidents which increase on rails, roads and in the air are also not the reason. Perhaps after seeing a lot of places one loses one's appetite to see places. Perhaps, I prefer to sit down in my easy chair to write more, keeping the travel bug away.

The American poet Longfellow made a point when he

"Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest;
Home-keeping hearts are happiest."

But Americans do not agree with it. Edna St. Vincent Millay responded:

My heart is warm with the friends I make
And better friends I'll not be knowing,
But there isn't a train I would't take
No matter where it's going.

George Pierson's remarks are relevant in this connection. He points out: (p. 48)

In the seventeenth century, William Penn was of the opinion that "A man, like a watch, is to be valued for his going." In the twentieth century, George Santayana noted that "All his life he (the American) jumps into the train after it has started and jumps out before it has stopped; and he never once gets left behind or breaks a leg.

The average American who "moves with confidence" believes in the dictum of Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "This generation has a rendezvous with destiny." I wonder whether Jawaharlal Nehru's famous expression "tryst with destiny" at the time of India's Independence on 15 August 1947 has anything to do with Roosevelt's expression "rendezvous with destiny."

Are Wordsworth's words worth something?

He travelled here, he travelled there:-
But not the value of a hair
Was head or heart the better.

Seneca's serene statement is worth listening to.

Everywhere is nowhere. When a person spends all his time in foreign travel, he ends by having many acquaintances and no friends.

This wayward life is not the pastime of the present century. Even in the last century the British boasted of dwelling in strange places and civilising them through military as well as missionary conquests. As Pierson puts it:

So it is almost as if Englishmen saw in travel what they themselves were putting into it: discovery, adventure, ambition, pride, idealism, and self-sacrifice. Almost as if for them the words of movement were the expression of half-realized desires. Unlike the French, they were not afraid to go abroad. By the waters of Babylon they neither wailed nor wept. Like the sturdy Romans, an Englishman needed only the cloak of his citizenship to go anywhere. In moving he did not have to change.

The news of war between Iraq and the allied forces the Kuwait issue in January-February 1991 saddened I feel sorry for all civilians and the army on both as who suffered the consequences. Expressing his sets on the China-India war in 1962, K.P.S. Menon, had been previously ambassador to China, quotes Valery (p. 303)

History is the most dangerous concoction the chemistry of the mind has produced. Its properties are well known. It sets people dreaming, intoxicates them, engenders false memories, exaggerates their reflexes, keeps old wounds open, torments their leisure, inspires them with megalomania or persecution complex, and makes nations bitter, proud, insufferable and vain.

Americans spend billions of dollars just on domestic nation and pleasure travel. Let me add the 'b' in word on is not a typographical error for million, although typist occasionally makes such mistakes while typing from my illegible handwriting. How much Indians

spend on travel, I do not know. Considering the poor Indian economy and the per capita income, I guess it will be only in millions and not in billions as in America.

Americans move more often than Indians. When we send the *Voice of the East* magazine sometimes it comes back with a slip "Reason Checked" affixed on it by the Post Office. Sometimes the column checked is "Moved, Left no address." Sometimes there is a remark "expired". I felt sad for the soul of my friend who expired. Later I understood that it is not the person who expired; it is the period for forwarding to the new address. I guess it could be a month or two.

Sometimes they are kind enough to put the final forwarding address on the cover and return it to me from America. I could not imagine the purpose of that giving me the last forwarding address. When the magazine to my friend Howard Wells came back to me I wrote a letter to the "Occupier" in that address in San Diego. I told the occupier that I was the friend of organist Howard Wells. Could he tell me his present address or let me know if he had expired?

It was like Mary Magdalene who asked the risen Lord mistaking him to be the gardener, to tell her about her Master's dead body and where it was transferred from the tomb. Howard Wells replied me that he himself is the occupier of the apartment in the address. My joy was doubled. He is not only alive but also his address is with me. The Post Office could have easily delivered that magazine to him in the Upas Street in San Diego. But in that case, I will not know this change of address. I will keep sending the magazine in the old address. And

permanent is this new address? The moving American on and on.

Now-a-days when somebody tells me that his friend America died, I insist on double-checking it, because it is forwarding address that often expires and not the

the Americans keep going not only in action but also use of expressions for movement. The "Moving Man", the book already referred to, which I was (it was one of the books I received without) lists a lot of words on the word "go", as it is in the *American Thesaurus of Slang* edited by L. V. and M. V. D. Bark. Stating that the treatment of word "go" has no less than thirteen columns in the of the *American Thesaurus* on "slanguage", Pierson (p. 50)

American can go: *all out, all the way, to pieces or around in circles; bug-house, hay-wire or nuts; mad, blooey, boom or broke; hog-wild, head over heels, great guns, lickety-split, or like a bat out of hell. They can go steady, straight, sour, or wrong. They can go their own sweet way, and tell others to go fly a kite, jump in the lake, peddle their papers, or (more insultingly) go way back and sit down. We will go down the line for a friend; go for six or sleighride; go it alone or one better: go off the rail or one's rocker; go on the loose, a bender, the racks, or the wagon; go out of circulation; go the distance, works, or Whole hog; go to bat for, beat the band, the races, the mat, or the wall; go up the spout or the river,*

In the year 1964, two years before I went to America for study, the Americans used 55 million oil credit cards, drove 86 million motor vehicles, some 838 billion miles and lost about 43,000 lives on road accidents. On an average, they had to handle 4,000 changes of address a day. The estimate is a 30% residential mobility a year. What an automotive civilization and a perpetual transportation!

CHAPTER 3

Jack-of-all-trades

As I switched swiftly from preaching to writing, from singing to playing sitar and from writing serious theological books to light-reading joke books, some folks call me Jack-of-all-trades. I do not think they are right. The article entitled "The Do-It-Yourself and American Character", in the glossy magazine *SPAN*, published by the Americans in India (Not American Indians, I hasten to add) has a few remarks that throw light on the American character. My study of two years in New York and Princeton (1966-68) may have influenced me perhaps unconsciously, to attempt to do anything and everything, to write a book or an autobiography.

Leonard J. Baldyga, the publisher of *SPAN* (which I receive freely by virtue of having lived in the U. S. A. for a while), recalls with amusement the earnest and futile attempts of the Indians to ape the Americans in his "Letter from the publisher", January 1991 issue. He writes: (*SPAN*, Vol XXXII, No.1, p.1)

I have often noticed with amusement how readily newcomers to America, Indians prominent among them, quickly get caught up in this most American of traits. Someone who successfully has replaced a broken window pane may decide he is

ready to undertake something more ambitious installing an electric garage-door opener, for instance or replacing the shingles on the roof of his home. Enthusiasm and optimism, however can quickly succumb to a bruised thumb or psyche if one has not prepared properly for such a project.

James Finn, editor of *Freedom at Issue*, a bimonthly publication of *Freedom House*, which SPAN describes as think tank, in New York City, comments on the jack-of-all-trades character of the Americans in the article referred above, "The-Do-It-Yourself and the American Character". He writes: (SPAN, *op. cit.*, P. 33)

An American finds it very easy to change his trade, suiting his occupation to the needs of the moment. One comes upon those who have been in turn lawyers, farmers, merchants, ministers of the Gospel, and doctors. Though an American may be less skilled than a European in each craft, there is hardly any skill to which he is a complete stranger.

Going back to the early history of the modern American (which, of course, is not very early, from the vantage point of an average Indian, whether real Indian or American Indian) and citing the example of Benjamin Franklin who was born in 1706, "born poor, but became a printer, a business man, a writer, a philosopher, a scientist, a politician a skilled ambassador and signer of the constitution of the United States" James Finn comments : (SPAN, *op. cit.*, P.33)

The new country did not have resources to support those who did not contribute to its

development. That development took hard work, and hard work was valued accordingly. Franklin recalls the typically American way the people themselves expressed this fact : " God Almighty is himself a mechanic, the greatest in the Universe; and he is respected and more admired for the variety, ingenuity, and utility of his handiworks, than for the antiquity of his family."

That attitude toward work runs as a strong strain through American life, history and literature. James Russell Lowell, an acclaimed 19th-century poet, wrote:

.....there is always work,
And tools to work withal, for those who will,
and blessed are the horny hands of toil.

Quoting Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a leader and educator, the above article goes on to state that in America "the jack-of-all trades" is giving way to the expensive specialists. (*Ibid*, P. 33).

The impulse to do it yourself, then, flourished on necessity and pride in hard work and inventiveness all of which the environment of the new world conspired to nourish. But that new environment is no longer new, the open frontier is no longer open and, for the most part, the jack-of-all trades has long since given way to the specialist.

On the lighter side of the Do-It-Yourself character the same article draws our attention to "a touch of

whimsy" which the writer thinks the "yet another typically American characteristic". (*Ibid*, P. 34)

The do-it-yourself trait sometimes manifests itself in a way that exhibits yet another typically American characteristic—the tendency to add a touch of whimsy, fun and humor to everything. After encountering books that instruct one in how to build an acobe house, an igloo, a kayak, a solar heater; how to make fishing flies, mobiles, animated movies, microlabs, and wedding dresses; how to fix cars, watches and washing machines; it is only a slight surprise to find a book entitled *How to Do Almost Everything* and another titled *How to Fix Almost Every Damn Thing*.

Vulgar Language

Keeping aloof from mundane matters such as profane periodicals and obscene cinemas since childhood, I am not well acquainted with vulgar language. But when I read the autobiography *My Story* of Mrs. Kamala Das (known as Madhavikutty) I knew that one has to use a little vulgar language in order to attract wider readership. In Malayalam language too some weeklies soar in circulation when the language they use tickles the readers.

I wish to recall what an old Hindu lady shared with me recently. she was hurt when her daughter-in-law used vulgar language against her. The old lady came to me asking for some words of solace to her. She tried to explain to me the hardships she had to undergo to bring up her handicapped son. Now a girl, who had no share

inner suffering, claims all rights over her son, just because she is the wife of her son.

With the limited knowledge I have about this vexing perennial problem I confronted the old lady with an advice that she should not worry about this problem. She should understand that it is the law of nature that the son replaces the mother. Her son is not just her son, he is the husband of her daughter-in-law. The old lady lost patience. She wanted to influence me in her favour. At this end she revealed to me the nature of the "vulgar" language and abuse the daughter-in-law hurled against her. How could she repeat the 'vulgar language'? She had already claimed that she had not used vulgar language in her life. She had not heard such language.

To get over the difficulty of repeating the abusive language used by her daughter-in-law, the old lady said, "In my shop, I am helpless, for I do not know any language other than Malayalam. Otherwise I could have informed her what vulgar words she had hurled at me. In Malayalam, I cannot repeat them, for, it will be sinful." The old lady had found a use for English or any foreign language to convey the vulgar words which are not utterable by a decent lady in her mother tongue. The way she stood shivering! I knew that she would have repeated those words if she had known English even a little bit.

Recently a senior friend Abraham Eapen Palampadam Kottayam gave me a copy of the autobiography of P. S. Menon (*Many Worlds Revisited*, Bombay: Varatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981). I read it with interest. P. S. Menon had obtained a First in history from

Oxford and had joined the Indian Civil Service under the British. He was the personification of perfection. I had the privilege of meeting him in Trichur during his years of retirement which he spent at Ottapalam. As expected, his autobiography was excellent and inimitable with regard to the style of language and diction.

What about vulgarity? As a master diplomat, whose diplomacy is well known in China, Russia etc. he preferred to quote others when he had to use "vulgar" language. It won't be his own. It may be a reference to Dr. T. M. Nair or Nikita Krushchev or such others.

Dr. T. M. Nair, a Hindu friend, a non-Brahmin, hailing from Kerela, did not like Mrs. Anie Besant, the English woman who founded the Theosophical Society in Madras. About these two personalities K. P. S. Menon writes: (*Many Worlds Revisited*, Bombay, 1981, P. 43)

He did not have Mrs. Besant's gift of sky-soaring soul-stirring eloquence, but his speeches were even more delightful to listen to, because they were spiced with humour. He was one of the founders of the Non-Brahmin movement in Madras. His enemy No. 1 was the Brahmin, but he did not spare the Englishman either. Once he exclaimed, 'Scratch a European and you will find a barbarian'. On another occasion, a professor of philosophy was brought from England, Dr. Nair protested against the appointment as a sheer waste of money, and when the Government spokesman tried to justify it, said, 'If that is all the justification the Government has to offer, either the science is a fraud or the professor is an impostor.' Sometimes

he was downright vulgar. At a public meeting he described Mrs. Besant as 'a woman of deep penetration, quick conception and easy delivery'. By his devastating wit and humour, irony and sarcasm, invective and innuendo, Dr. Nair debunked Mrs. Besant in the eyes of the people.

Nikita Krushchev was quoted in this book as an example of "saying things which sometimes became vulgar." (*Many Worlds Revisited*, pp. 341, 342).

To some extent, Krushchev was his own enemy. His embullience, which was very attractive to start with, began to get on people's nerves. He had a homely way of saying things which sometimes became vulgar. To give a mentionable example, explaining why he decided to reverse Stalin's policies towards Yugoslavia, he said at a public meeting: "Stalin said that he had only to lift his little finger and Tito would fall. Stalin lifted his little finger and every other organ and yet Tito did not fall." This remark of Krushchev's was greeted with loud laughter by the peasants, but the scholars and intellectuals shook their heads. They thought the manner in which he took off his shoes and banged them on the desk in the United Nations was unworthy of the Prime Minister of a great country.

I do not know whom should I quote in this work to follow the same line of action. Perhaps I have already crossed the mark of decency while quoting K.P.S. Menon. Being a religious person I should act with discretion and use restraint before I indulge in washing the dirty linen in public, especially when it is at the expense of others.

My brithday

During a send-off meeting to Bishop K. C. Sethi in 1990 I "revealed" that the Bishop's birthday coincided with the birth day of Karl Marx. On completion of 65 years the Bishop retired on 5 May 1990. Neither the Bishop nor the people present on the occasion had thought of this "closeness" of the bishop to the birthday of the author of 'Das Capital'.

To my surprise it was only in 1991 I realised that my birthday has a coincidence with the birthday of the Kerala Karl Marx, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the general Secretary of the Marxist party, who was born on 13 June 1909. I was born on the day he completed 31 years of age. In other words when I completed 50 years of age on 13 June 1990, E. M. S., as he is affectionately called, completed 81 years of age.

He still goes strong. He was the first communist to be a Chief Minister in any Indian state. As a matter of fact he is the first ever in history, anywhere in the world to come to power through ballots and not through bullets. He was the first Chief Minister of the linguistic state of Kerala formed by adding parts of the erstwhile Madras state to Travancore-Cochin state which was the result of the merger of two princely states soon after India's Independence. He was Chief Minister twice during 1957-59 and 1967-69.

In the year of my birth the famous Malayalam playback singer Yesudas (meaning servant of Jesus) was born too. He is actually a few months older than I. The V. I. P.s who are a few months younger than I am, are

narad Pawar, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, the megastar Amitabh Bachan and many other famous personalities whose age is not known to me. I think J. K. Antony, former Chief Minister of Kerala who was recently re-elected to the Rajya Sabha, is also a product of 1940.

My beard

When I was going to Holland in September 1984 to attend the Syriac Symposium, the Customs checking was very strict in Amsterdam. The officer examined each and everything in my briefcase including letters. I asked my companions afterwards as to why my baggage was checked so scrupulously. The reply amused me; "You look like Bhindranwale!"

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a sikh militant who was believed to have been killed during the Indian army attack on the Akal Takht of the Golden Temple on 6 June 1984. This is known as the Operation Bluestar which later led to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two Sikh Policemen who were supposed to guard her. When 31 corpses were found in the Akal Takht after Operation Bluestar, the Indian government claimed that one of the dead bodies was that of Bhindranwale. There are still some Sikhs who do not believe Bhindranwale is dead.

Thus in September 1984, anybody with beard would be suspected to be Bhindranwale. My beard was somewhat of the same size. In 1984, when he was assassinated, he was 42 and I was 44, two years difference wouldn't count. Bhindranwale too was a preacher like

me. He was the head of the Damdami Taksal, the oldest Theological Seminary of the Sikh religion. It was at the age of 35 he left that high pedestal to become a political activist. This change "from that of a purveyor of religion to that of a rabble rouser" was with the blessings of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1977, when he was out of power after the Emergency. Later Mrs. Gandhi could not control him.

I never saw Bhindranwale and whatever similarities we may have physically are not worth mentioning, as I remained in religion without advocating any terrorism in the name of religion. If India has to be a peaceful country, worth living in, all sorts of communalism, hatred and terrorism should be eschewed forthwith by all and condemned by religious, social and political leaders.

Some people look at me with suspicion as I pass through airports. There is some similarity between my bearded face and that of the jet-setting godman, Chandra Swami. He is a middle-aged middleman who has contact with the affluent and the mighty. There is an article about this god man, who is younger than I and whose beard is darker than mine. This article about him in the *Indian Express* magazine dated 17 February 1991 is interesting and informative reading. The writer describes Chandra Swami as "flashing white, green, red and gold he looked as luridly appealing as a Christmas tree." Though I have nothing in common with this godman except the beard, the lengthy excerpt quoted below is a sample of the ingenuity of this Indian as well as the style of journalism in India today. Sunil Sethi says:

How did he get on top? Via that money-mad power-mad sex-mad cliffhanger called New York, that incandescent yet indestructible town enshrined in *Bonfire of the Vanities*. When Chandraswami first got there in the late 1970s he did not live, as he now does, in Khashoggi's penthouse in Olympic Tower of Fifth Avenue, but he rocked round the clock, spreading his net wide. He dealt in commodities-attempting to trade in coal from Kentucky, soya beans from Surinam, copper from President Mobutu's Zaire. People were his business (they still are) and how they adored him: Senators (Jim Wright), dictator (Ferdinand Marcos), royalty (Princess Mariam, the half Japanese favoured second wife of the Sultan of Brunei) governors (Julian Carroll), tycoons (Lord Forte of Trusthouse Forte) and pop stars (Asha Puthli) sought him for individual needs and, in turn, were used by him. In Andy Warhol's city he practiced Warhol's famous Polaroid slogan: "Everyone can be famous for 15 seconds". But Chandraswami knows something more: if you hang on to your Polaroid you can be famous forever. He is India's most enduring guru because, by carrying snapshots of the world in his pocket, he has turned himself into a camera.

The Week, dated January 13, 1991 in its "Special Port" under the caption *Muddle man* calls Chandraswami, the sultan of scandal. The writer Malashanker calls him "the mediator-incarnate."

Real Contacts

In keeping contact with people, I feel that I am not adept, particularly when my role as a shepherd makes

it imperative that I should be in constant touch with people. More than books, I need to be in touch with the people. Perhaps I should set apart a part of the time which I spend at present on writing, for contacts with people.

In the other hand, I often hear the complaint, which I plead guilty, that whenever somebody comes to see me, I spend more time than necessary. I have made up my mind to be alert on the time I spend with visitors and friends; but the following comment I read about the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Delhi, Angelo Fernandes, at the time of his retirement recently, made me ignore the criticism. In *Indian Currents*, a new "national news weekly" published from Delhi (January 21, 1990 Vol II, No. 17, p. 4) we read.

Thousands have drawn inspirations from his meetings. His meetings with people were usually long, but highly inspiring for those who wished to draw from the fountain of careful observation; deep reflection and intense prayer.

There is no golden rule about the duration of an interview or a visit. I should use my discretion according to the importance of the men and matters I deal with. Ofcourse, telephone and other pressing engagements often interrupt even important meetings. The people who come to see me may not have the time or patience to wait indefinitely.

The Dalai Lama of Tibet, living in exile in India, who got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, released his autobiography recently. It is entitled *Freedom in Exile*. 7

Autobiography of the Dalai Lama of Tibet, published by Hodder and Stoughton (Price £ 16.95). That is about 600 rupees. Ordinary people have to be content with the excerpts from it appearing in reviews in magazines. The Dalai Lama gives very important and interesting information in the book which capture the attention of the readers. He describes how he was spotted when he was three years old in 1939 as the re-incarnation of the 13th Lama. No wonder he cannot remember details about it.

Food was a problem to the Dalai Lama. As a child he enjoyed eating eggs or pork denied to a Dalai Lama. So at his parents' home he used to indulge in eating the forbidden food. He reminisces:

Once I remember being caught in the act of eating eggs by the Gyop Kenpo, one of my senior officials. He was very shocked, and so was I.

"Go away"; I shouted at the top of my voice.

CHAPTER 4

With a funny bone

During the past decade a special trait developed in me was the knack of cracking jokes. Perhaps this talent was latent in me. Yet I had a feeling that preachers have to be serious minded people. Gradually it changed.

Bishop's Jokes is a book I wrote in a lighter vein. That was a turning point. Many appreciated that work. Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom "accused" me of making money for the publishers. As for me it was labour of love. I did not receive any royalty. Nevertheless the parish Church which published it made some profit. When the Malayalam translation of the 100 out of 200 jokes, was published under the caption "Holy Jokes", I gave my permission to publish it without any claims for royalty.

Laugh with the Bishop is the second book. I got 7½% royalty, I claimed it in kind and not in money. Many of my friends would laugh free of charge, as they got some of these complimentary copies from me.

The third book *Laugh to Health* was published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras.

The fourth book *Holy Humour* is being completed. I plan to write 3 more small books of jokes. Then I hope

to compile all the jokes from these seven books into one single volume entitled *Thousand and one Jokes*.

Accidentally an old reprint of an editorial in the December 1969 issue of *Bibla Digest* (Published from 704 Karuizawa, Nagano Ken 389-01, Japan) was seen in the pile of old papers in my room. The editorial written by Marvin L. Fieldhouse entitled *PREACHER with a Funny Bone* states:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

In his great book *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Brother John Bunyan describes the frightening account of Demas and his silver mine. Christian and Hopeful had just left the town of Vanity Fair only to be immediately attracted by a man standing off to the side of the King’s Highway beckoning to them, saying that there was great profit for all those who would come and try their hand at digging in his silver mine. He reasoned that if they looked they could see the glitter of the lucre there. So close was it, within earshot of the King’s Highway, that with scarce any effort at all they could go over, dig treasure, and before they knew it return again to their journey.”.....

Now the silver and gold vein catch some men as the moral vein catches others: the tasty food vein snares some men, and the vein of sweet human praise takes others. But I am specially concerned

here with just those who are caught in the humour vein—the funny preachers who have somewhere, sometime, had too deep a draught of the laughing gases from some attractive mine along the King's Highway.

I began to think seriously about this matter of preachers and playboys several years ago. A brother gave in my hearing a very serious testimony of how God dealt with him over a rebellious experience as a young Christian. A few years later, after he had backslidden some and had obeyed certain dictates from his cold heart, I heard him tell the same story again; this time, however, everything was funny to the extreme. Previously he had gripped his hearers with conviction because he was a tool in God's hands; now as a tool of men, he only tickled them with that same serious story."

Marvin L. Fieldhouse who condemns religious jokes in his editorial referred to, states unequivocally:

"Toward more picturesque Speech" in the pulpit was never a Bible-born project. But I Timothy 3:2 has always been a Divine thrust, along with Titus 1:8,9; Titus 2:4; I Peter 5:8 and 4:7; not to speak of reams of other texts which can be neither laughed off, laughed away, or laughed down."

"One of the most effective tools of Satan in Japan against the Christian cause", writes Fieldhouse, "is Biblical jesting, humour based on the Scriptures or the truth." He says the TV shows in Japan are making fun

the gospel. He cannot tolerate when "Some puppet personality is seen in Church, at the organ, singing, "Yes, Jesus Loves Me."

Having read his condemnation that "This brand of thehenistic blasphemy is far too near akin to the same foolery practised and promoted" in some of our churches, I can feel his righteous indignation. Yet I have totally changed my approach to satire in the Church.

As there is always a danger of overemphasis on your as you feel after reading this autobiography or one of my joke books, I quote below one more paragraph from the same editorial. Let us not forget that we are not only for laughing, but also for thinking and bringing us to the right track.

"Light and frivolous preaching in the homeland has produced light and frivolous missionaries; and in Bible light this always reproduces weak converts and weaker churches. So that joking, jesting attitude towards God's truth in the pulpit can spread itself around the world in the form of a careless and listless attitude and concept of the finality of God's authority both in His Word and in His universe. Let all ministers of God take solemn warning: your crucified funny bone will actively militate against the cause of Christ in a lost world, and all those who have been to Calvary must of necessity treat you as an enemy."

I had a doubt, naturally, whether there is any justification for a religious man like me to indulge in the writing of jokes. I had the answer that Mar Aprem, the

Syrian Saint who died in 373 A. D., was a man of humour. He did not forget to be humorous even in a prayer. In the final stanza of a hymn on Eucharist Saint Aprem sings:

“Look, Lord, my lap is now filled with
the crumbs from your table (Matthew 15:27)
there is no more room in the folds of my garment
so hold back your gift as I worship before you;
keep it in your treasure house in readiness to
give it us on another occasion (Faith 10:22)

Mar Gregorius Bar Hebraya took the courage to write a book entitled *The Laughable Stories*. When I went to visit the monastery of Mar Mattai in Mosul, Iraq in March 1990, I stood in front of the tomb of this jovial bishop (He was *Maphrian*, i. e., No.2 in the hierarchy in the Syrian Orthodox Church) who died in 1286 A.D. The soul of this delightful bishop must have giggled to see another bishop in his line, after six centuries.

St. Francis de Sales (16th century) was a humorous personality. His “classes were often jolly affairs, punctuated by laughter” as he used to illustrate a serious point with a funny story. Francis de Sales was no holy fool. He had earned a law degree before becoming a priest. St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, who wrote *Spiritual Exercises*, advised his students: “Laugh and grow strong”.

In 1989 a clergyman from America came to the Christian Medical College, Vellore, Tamilnadu to attend the College Council. I attended the same council, as

usual, representing my Church. I gave him one of my two joke books. I do not remember whether it was the *Bishop's Jokes* or *Laugh With the Bishop*. He revealed to me that he was a Christian Clergy Clown in the U.S.A. He promised to send me *The Joyful Noiseletter* of the Fellowship of Merry Christians. That was not a joke. After a few months I began to receive "*The Joyful Noiseletter*". There was a book entitled "*The Joyful Christ*" written by Cal Samra in America.

The Joyful Christ published in 1986 is a revised and expanded edition of *Jesus Put on a Happy Face* published a year earlier. This book begins with two quotations from the Bible.

When you fast, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do." (Matt. 6:16)

"I have told this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)

I learned quite a lot from that book in favour of writing more jokes. To be a witty person is not unbecoming of a Christian preacher. Cal Samra speaks of St. Jerome (p. 109).

"The great monastic Jerome (d.A.D. 420) also had a ready smile and a ready wit. He once described a critic of the Christians as "big and fat, a fellow bloated with Scots porridge." Criticizing some of the clergy of Rome and Antioch, Jerome observed, "All their anxiety is about their clothes You would take them for bridegrooms rather than for clerics; all they think about is to know the names and houses and doings of rich ladies."

The author cites the example of St Martin also: (p. 109)

“St. Martin’s troublesome deacon, Brice, called him crazy, but Martin, bishop of Tours (d. A. D. 444), refused to dismiss him, saying, ‘If Christ could tolerate Judas, surely I can tolerate Brice. Brice later succeeded Martin and became an exemplary bishop.’”

Philip Neri is another interesting character. He is a Catholic clown-priest of the 16th century. About him we read: p. 108.

“Everywhere Philip went, people laughed, according to Knowles. ‘There was no end to the mad things he did.’ Once, Neri shaved half his beard off and toured the streets of Rome as a half bearded priest.

He frequently visited the sick in hospitals ‘always with the same friendly smile, and the same friendly greeting.’ Neri once cured Pope Clement of gout simply by shaking hands with him – one of the many cures that were attributed to him. Shortly before he died in 1595, he ‘appeared to be in a radiantly happy mood, bordering on exultation.’

The role of humour is to keep our listeners awake. Some sermons are so boring that the worshippers have nothing to do except sleep and snore. Carl Samra writes: (p. 86)

“My favorite story about Paul, which shows his tenderness and humanity, happened in Troas:

when a boy fell asleep during one of Paul's endless sermons. Henry Ward Beecher, a great nineteenth-century Congregationalist preacher and wit, once remarked that the role of humor in Church was to keep parishioners awake on Sunday. But even Paul's wit and eloquence could not keep this young man awake."

About the qualities of a good wife, the writer of Proverbs has something to advise us: (Cal Samra, p. 61)

"The writer of Proverbs found happiness in a wife who, among other virtues, could laugh. "A perfect wife—who can find her? She is far beyond the price of pearls...She is clothed in strength and dignity, she can laugh at the days to come...When she opens her mouth, she does so wisely; on her tongues is kindly instruction." (Prov. 31:10-25).

Jokes should not be overdose. Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom who wrote the Foreword to my first book of Jokes called *Bishop's Jokes*, is the wittiest person I personally know of. But reading the book of Cal Samra I realised that Bishop John Chrysostom of the 4th century was not only a golden tongued orator, but also a witty person. My friend Philipose Mar Chrysostom is the only Indian I know of, who has taken the name of Bishop John Chrysostom. Thus I can now trace his sense of humour to his namesake 16 centuries ago. Cal Samra states: (p. 111)

"Chrysostom delivered such brilliant and witty homilies that people often broke out into enthusiastic applause in the middle of the worship service.

This grieved Chrysostom, a humble man, and thereafter he instructed all the clergy to give their sermons at the very end of the service, so that the focus of the service would always be fixed on the Lord, not on the clergy."

I was invited to give three talks during a retreat in Alwaye in September 1990, which is an annual event to remember the late K. C. Chacko, uncle of Mr. K. M. Mathew, at present Chief Editor of the leading Malayalam daily *Malayala Manorama*. Mr. K. C. Chacko was one of the founders of the Union Christian College, Alwaye in 1920. Therefore some retired principals of that great institution were present for the retreat.

The topics of the three talks were announced in the invitation cum programme sheet circulated early. The organizing Secretary Mr. Cheeran Mathews had given me the freedom to choose my topics as he thought "I was a busy person, and would not have time to prepare new papers according to the demands of the organizers." The titles chosen by me were:

1. Humour in the Holy Bible.
2. Humour in the Church Fathers.
3. Humour in the Christian Church today.

One of the senior priests present there reminded me that it was a retreat and I was supposed to be serious. I replied that we have to change our concepts of being "devout" or "religious." The opening Bible text of my retreat talk was Psalms 2:4. "The one whose throne is in heaven sits laughing." On the whole, people "enjoyed"

talk. Were they benefitted spiritually by my talk, now I not.

I had gone to Alwaye armed with some copies of the *Joyful Noiseletter*, the periodical of the Fellowship of Merry Christians in the U.S.A. Some people make a mistake and put it Marry Christians instead of Merry Christians.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the famous British writer who died in 1990, was listed as one of the Consulting Editors of *The Joyful Noiseletter*. It was there in the Union Christian College, Alwaye, the young Malcolm Muggeridge had begun his career as a lecturer in English language. After he left Alwaye he became famous. Perhaps some among my audience were students of the young Malcolm Muggeridge. He earned a name as a really humorous person in his later years. His name appears in the list of Consulting Editors even after his death. The Editor Calamra claims, after his death Muggeridge continues his Consulting Editor's status in heaven. Whether heaven will tolerate real human humour is a matter of debate.

In the Greek Orthodox world, St. Symeon of Emessa, sixth century monk, always had a ready joke. He went to mock the world." One Sunday he took some walnuts to the Church. He made noise by cracking the nuts. When he went to the pulpit and tossed walnuts to the parishioners. Whenever he met "demoniacs", he behaved like one of them and healed many of them by his prayers.

Bishop Kallistos Ware, the scholarly Orthodox Bishop of England, writes of St. Symeon:

“Like Christ, the fool goes out in search of the lost sheep and brings it back on his shoulders. He goes down into the pit to draw others out of it. Folly, for Symeon, was a way of showing love for others. Folly opened for him doors that otherwise would have remained closed.”

Like Christ, the fool does not curse or condemn, and therein lies his power of attraction.” (*Sobornost* 6:2; 1984)

St. John Climacus of Mount Sinai (d. 649) was a man of laughter like Symeon. He wrote, “God does not insist or desire that we should mourn in Agony of heart; rather it is his wish that out of love for Him, we should rejoice with laughter in our soul.” St. John of Damascus (d. 754) wrote in one of his hymns, “It is for us that Christ has ordained the festivals, for there is no joy to the wicked.”

In the last generation Billy Sunday (1862-1935), a famous preacher (before Billy Graham), is claimed to have converted half a million people by his wit. Once he was asked, “Can one smoke in heaven?” Billy Sunday replied, “I do not know. But you have to go to hell to light the cigarette.”

Feodor Dostoevsky writes:

“If you wish to glimpse inside a human soul and get to know a man, don’t bother analyzing his ways of being silent, of talking, of weeping, of seeing how much he is moved by noble ideas; you will get better results if you just watch him laugh. If he laughs well, he’s a good man.”

Reinhold Niebuhr is considered one of the greatest Protestant theologians of this century. I heard him speak while I was studying for the S. T. M. degree in the Union Theological Seminary, New York in 1966. It was after his retirement from that august institution. He was trying to awaken the conscience of the Americans against the Vietnam War. He was not in favour of cracking jokes in the preaching. On one occasion he declared:

“There is laughter in the vestibule of the temple, the echo of laughter in the temple itself; but only faith and prayer, and no laughter, in the [holy of holies.”

All the Protestant preachers were not “intellectual’ like Reinhold Niebuhr. A Methodist preacher who lived a century ago in the U. S. A., Sam Jones, preached with humour. He was highly successful in getting his message across. He preached once: (*The Joyful Christ*, p. 137)

“Yes, there are plenty of brains in hell, you understand that, don’t you? What is culture worth if it is whitewash on a rascal? I would rather be in heaven learning my A. B. C. ,s than sitting in hell reading Greek. We have been clamoring for forty years for a learned ministry and we have got it today, and the church is deadlier than it ever has been in history. Half of the literary preachers in this town are A. B.’s, Ph.D.’s, L.L.D.’s, and A.S.S.’s”.

If one has a sense of humour, anything and everything he takes cognizance of, or comments on, will radiate that lighter vein. For example, Mark Twain, the humorist, has an interesting and informative description about Australia.

When he left Australia at the close of the last century, he wrote: (*New Times*, March 27-April 2, 1990, p 29)

“Australian history is almost always picturesque; indeed, it is so curious and strange that it is itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer, and so it pushes the other novelties into second and third place. It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies. And all of a fresh new sort, no moldy old stale ones. It is full of surprise and adventures and incongruities, and contradictions, and incredibilities, but they are all true, they all happened.”

The Joyful Noiseletter is a six-page periodical which brings joy and laughter. The latest issue, Vol.6, No. 1, dated January 1991 reached me on the last Monday in March when I was having a hectic day with a line of visitors pouring in and a lot of problems to be solved. This Epistle of the Fellowship of Merry Christians gave me some relaxation and amusement to smile and laugh. Some jokes that humoured me in the January issue are reproduced below for the benefit and recreation of the mind of the readers of this autobiography.

“A boy was watching his father, a pastor, write a sermon.

“How do you know what to say?” he asked.

“Why, God tells me,” the clergyman replied.

“Oh,” said the lad. “Then why do you keep crossing things out?”

-Archbishop John L. May, St. Louis

A religion teacher asked her fifth-graders to write down the Lord's prayer. Rev. Paul J

Lamberty of Metairie, LA, passed on some of the results:

"Our Father, hough ward in heaven, halo be thy name..."

"Our Father, who aren't in heaven, hollow be thy name...."

"Our Father, who heart in heaven, hollow be thy name..."

"Our Father, huart in heaven, how will be thy name..."

"Our Father, who art in heaven, howlet will be thy name..."

"Our Father, who arten heaven, holly be thy name..."

"Thy kingdom come, I will be done..."

"Gave us this day our daily beard..."

"Forgive us this day our daily bread..."

"And forgive us for our dress passes as we forgive those who dress pass against us..."

"And forgive us our trust passes..."

"If there is no hell, a good many preachers are gaining money under false pretenses."

-Billy Sunday

"We don't stop laughing because we grow old; we grow old; because we stopped laughing."

-via Rev. John J. Kelly, O. M. I. Tracy, CA

"Most people are bothered by those passages of scripture they do not understand but the passages that bother me are those I do understand."

-Mark Twain

“Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind. Youth means the predominance of courage over timidity, of adventure over the love of ease. This often exists in a man of 60 more than a boy of 20. Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals. You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair.”

-Samuel Ullman

Holy Humor Drives Out The Devil

Hell was angered when it encountered Thee (Christ). Hell was angered for it was abolished; Hell was angered for it was mocked.”

-John Chrysostom (407 A. D.)
from his famous Easter sermon

“The devill...the prowde spirite...cannot endure to be mocked.

-Sir Thomas More (1535 A. D.)

“The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.”

-Martin Luther (1546 A. D.)

There are many casualties and untold miseries in the Gulf War. Yet the sense of humour is not a casualty even in Bagdad amidst the sirens of bombing and such terrible calamities. *India Today* dated Feb. 15, 1991 has this to say. (p. 37)

In Bagdad, a poster shows Bush, in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, standing next to an all-American barbecue, roasting a skewered dove of peace.

Jordanians say they are caught between Iraq and a hard place. The Iraqi media and officials often pronounce Bush as "Boosh" which is a local obscenity. Some other samples:

- * How do the Kuwaitis say Bismillah in the morning: Bushmillah.
- * How do the Palestinians say salam aleikum: Saddam aleikum.
- * Why are the Israelis stacking salami in their bomb shelters? Because Saddam is sending them free mustard (mustard gas).

In fairness to my friend Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom, I should quote a less funny comment about me from his humorous foreword to my book *Bishop's Jokes*:

Those who know him know that he is a dear servant of God, blessed with many talents, devoted to people, simple in his life, humble in his manners, and noble in this conduct. I am sure he will find great joy to know that his work has helped a few to relax, laugh and be at ease for some time at least. He rejoices to see others happy.

Yes, I am happy to know that many people enjoy this book. One prominent priest confided in me that he has two books near his bedside, one is the Bible and the other is the *Bishop's Jokes*. I will not be surprised if I hear somebody requests that my joke books be buried with him so that he can laugh even in heaven or hell, whichever place he ends up with.

Some people have hesitation whether they would shock the bishops and the priests if they crack jokes in their presence. Dr. A. A. Sandosham's wife Emily writes about an incident in the life of her husband who really had the gift of jokes. She writes about her husband proposing the toast at the wedding of their friend's daughter. (*The Sandoshams*, pp. 22,23)'

"As usual he came out with several of his jokes about brides, grooms, wedding, etc. He was afraid he might have shocked the Bishop and priests who were present but to his great relief the Bishop got up and congratulated him for the excellent performance and said he had never heard anything like that before. After Sandy sat down the Master of ceremonies, who was none other than Bosco De Cruz, told the gathering how Sandy got the name. He described how when Sandy was born his father went to have a look at him and how Sandy delighted him by coming out with his first joke. The father was so thrilled with the son's performance that he decided then and there to call him Sandosham which literally means 'happiness'.

As I write this chapter I have an itching sensation to make it a book by extending my canvass larger. But I resist the temptation now and conclude this discussion on jokes. Whereever I go, the people who know me greet me saying "Here comes the joker."

Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom while writing the Foreword to my book *Bishop's Jokes* has attempted a definition of jokes especially in relation to the Bishops.

"Jokes are things said or done to amuse people. People are amused at what the Bishops say and do. They dress queerly, live pompously, process somberly, preach obscurely, pray solitarily, appeal incessantly, cash liberally and work occasionally."

CHAPTER 5

Musings on Music

It is an admitted fact that I am not a talented singer. Yet I have the audacity to sing. This is because I enjoy singing, no matter whether good or bad. The strangest thing is that some people who hear me sing, often overestimate my ability. They rate my singing not by trusting their own ears, but by putting confidence in my readiness to burst into singing even at the slightest provocation or hint.

In February 1985, an American pastor Rev. Jeffrey L Cotter of the Santa Ynez Valley Presbyterian Church in Solvang, California came to preach in Kunnamkulam near Trichur. I presided over the meeting and got acquainted with him and his colleague. He was impressed by my instant singing and jokes. Three months later I got a letter from him. He writes; "Both Dick and I remember well your delightful sense of humour and your marvelous singing voice!" Such letters often make me defy my friend's warnings and sing embarrassing even my well-wishers.

Recently some of my friends have reluctantly begun to agree that my singing has improved. I do not know whether this change of attitude towards my singing is

really due to some considerable improvement in my performance or owing to the fact that their adverse comments about my singing have made me more defiant.

Realising that I am tone deaf, I decided to try instrumental music instead of vocal. I started with the harmonium, the typical Indian instrument for a beginner. It is the key board. We start from Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni.

Way back in 1957, when I was a 17 year old student in the Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur I had started with harmonium. I could count the notes 1 to 7 correctly and could press the seven keys accurately. I was a student of mathematics during my Intermediate Course, in St. Thomas College, Trichur. This gave me confidence. I could memorise the notes and press the appropriate keys. But music is more than that. Hence the music master asked me to sing S R G M P D Ni. I did. He asked me to try it properly. I did attempt again. He had enough experience to judge that I could not sing it properly. He categorically told me that I should desist from learning harmonium because I could not master the basic *ragas*. I protested, "Sir, I do not want to be a vocalist. I just want to play harmonium." He sent me away ceremoniously from the music class.

About a quarter of a century later, I bought an old harmonium and started learning it on my own. I avoided teachers because of the bitter previous experience. I could easily make out that my voice was less musical at that time than what it was at 17. I called this endeavour a hobby to keep me occupied during leisure time, if any. As I had given up playing volley ball by that time I thought of learning music as a much needed relaxation

a man like me. My progress was negligibly small. Meanwhile my friend Dr. P. C. Mathew of Munich, Germany had got made here a *Sitar*, the typically north Indian musical instrument. When he tried to ship it to Germany the Customs authorities in Cochin created problems insisting that the instrument should be opened and the inside examined to make sure that it did not conceal any gold or drug—not the life saving drug, but the stuff which people sniff to get a “kick” out of it. As the tone of the sitar will be impaired if it is opened, Mathew opted to donate it to me instead of shipping it abroad.

I kept the Sitar with me for some months. Finally I decided to learn to use it. Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ustad Bismillah Khan and Nikil Banerjee will always be remembered because they introduced a new technique in the use of fingers to produce notes to widen the raga of the sitar in three octaves. Ravi Shankar gets the credit of popularising it not only in India, but also abroad especially U. S. America. When I was a student in Princeton in 1967 I remember watching Ravi Shankar playing sitar on television. I did not have any idea at that time that one day I would play this instrument.

I have been trying to learn it for the past seven years. And I spent this much time on harmonium or organ I could have made rapid strides. Now in addition to Sitar I am trying to learn the organ—a Casio PT. 100. I can attest that electronic instrument to make better music than my erratic throat. When I sing Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni while moving my finger on the sitar, I sing C D E F G A B while I press the keys of this instrument which I bought in Singapore in 1987.

In March 1990 while visiting Bagdad, my Chui gave me some Iraqi dinars as a gift. As I am not allowed to take dinar out of Iraq I preferred to purchase a musical instrument. Instead of a western instrument which was expensive in Iraq owing to inflation following the Iraq-Iraq war (1980-1988). I had to look for an Iraqi instrument. Thus I bought *Ud*. Not only did I not know how to play it, but also how to pronounce the name of the instrument. After checking with experts I called it *Ud* or *Outh* as I printed it in my travelogue *The Assyrians in Iraq*.

It was in Vienna, I was able to learn the correct name of this instrument. It is called *Ud* in "*The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*" by Stanley Sadie, Vol. 1. In that Dictionary *Ud* is described as the "Short-necked plucked lute of the Arab world, the direct ancestor of the European lute, whose name derives from *al-ud* ('the lute')". It is considered as the "king, sultan or *emir* of musical instruments."

Now I have got a sitar, the "queen" of Indian musical instruments and *Ud*, the "sultan" of the Arab musical instruments. I have not yet started learning the Arabic one, as the only instruction manual I was able to procure is in the Turkish language. Nobody in my area has seen this Arab instrument. At this point I cannot predict whether it will remain in a corner of my room as a "curio", or will be in my hands to play Indian and Arab tunes. Having known my unpredictable over-enthusiasm for music, my friends will not be surprised if I am caught in the act of playing *Ud*.

After visiting Vienna and Bonn I learned more about Beethoven, the master composer. He was deaf towards

the end of his life. Yet he composed music. Ofcourse he had difficulty in responding to the applause of the audience at his perfect performances as he was turning his back on the audience while conducting an orchestra. Sometimes he had to be physically turned around to face the audience in order to feel the applause and the standing ovation of the audience. So hearing is not an absolute requirement to be a successful musician!

Writing Christian songs was another activity I found to satisfy my longing for music. If my friends laugh at the way I sing, I can write songs and make them sing and I can laugh and rejoice with them. It was when the urge became so compelling that I took my pen and began to write. I had never written songs before. Hence I was not sure how to compose a song. I counted the number of syllables of a song and began to write one similar to it. Although the tune was almost the same, the words were different.

It was a Good Friday in 1979. I was scheduled to preach a sermon at our Mar Slewa Church, Mattanchery, Cochin. I was staying at our St. Thomas Church, Ernakulam. After meditating on the Cross that Good Friday I started writing the song "Behold the Cross of Calvary."

Should I write it in Syriac language like Mar Aprem of the 4th century? I mused. I realised that there will be fluency and clarity only if I wrote it in Malayalam my mother tongue. Then I changed my mind. Thus it had a bilingual origin. The song came out in Syriac and Malayalam. Soon I did the English version also.

Translations in a hundred languages came out. My friends helped liberally. Some worked on the translation seriously. Fifty Indian and fifty foreign translations were made. The book came as a single volume with the song in 103 languages. It took about five years to complete this project.

An audio Cassette of some of these translations is a plan not yet executed. I have a French translation with me in a Cassette, recorded when the choir of the Roman Catholic Church at Chereneux in Belgium sang this song during my visit to them in 1988. The Malayalam translation was broadcast by the All India Radio, Trichur. Telugu translation came on the air in the Viswani radio broadcast from Sree Lanka. The Nepali translation was sung in the Church of North India (CNI) Church in Kalimpong at the foot of the Himalayas on a Good Friday. Thus this song went far and wide.

The Syriac translation of this song was published in Chicago at the initiative of Deacon Geevarghese S. Benjamin who was Syriac *Malpan* (teacher) in Trichur during 1929-33. I sent my translation to him to get his opinion. I had been his guest in Mosul in 1962 while returning after my studies in England. He liked my song and published it in his journal called "Voice of Nineveh." This gave me encouragement to write more songs in Syriac. I made some attempts now and then; but I could not succeed.

The publication of the book of this song in 103 languages presented some problems. Some suggested that I should print these translations in the original script. Such a proposition is good but expensive. Hence I put

only a few translations like Russian, Chinese, Syriac etc. in the original script and the majority in the Roman script. Everybody could read all the translations.

I had a fanciful idea of organising a 103-voice choir, each one singing in one language only thus making a total of 103 languages. That would have reminded us of the Tower of Babel where the words spoken by different people were not understood by one another. I had imagined myself playing the sitar to this 103 multi-language Pandemonium. Beethoven and Mozart who composed symphonies would have laughed at the antiphony of this eccentric musical extravaganza.

If different instruments in an orchestra like New York Philharmonic could make meaningful sounds in unison, immensely appreciated by the discerning music lovers, I humourously mused that some people could discover some harmony in these 103 people singing in different languages. But it needs a wizard of music to arrange and assemble talented people to pronounce properly the words in totally different tongues.

An attempt was made by me to learn by heart the first stanza (there are four stanzas) of this song. I learned about ten of these translation. Then it became increasingly difficult to proceed further. Whenever I attempted I forgot one or two of the earlier ones. The human mind has its limitations in registering things in our memory. The storing capacity may have been fully utilised. If I could memorize at least thirty of the 103 translations, I have, of this song I would write to the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

As a matter of fact even if I do not learn them by heart, it is enough if I can sing them pronouncing the words correctly. I read in the *Guinness Book* that Miss Latha Mangeshkar, the melody queen from North India has recorded songs in about 25 languages. Her name appears in the *Guinness Book* not only for the number of languages, but also for the maximum number of recorded songs which is above thirty thousand. Oh, boy! what a record! It is doubtful whether anybody can ever break such a record. Her equally talented younger sister, Mrs. Asha Bonsle is becoming increasingly popular. The other two sisters and the only brother, all five of them, are equally talented— a rare family of warblers.

Since I cannot conceive of coming closer to the singing record, I thought of looking up the *Guinness Book* for the maximum number of Christian devotional songs. I could not believe my eyes when I read that a lady who had lost her eye-sight while a small baby of six weeks, wrote 8500 devotional songs. Mrs. Fanny Crosby (1820-1915), the American lady who wrote such great songs as "Blessed assurance Jesus is mine", tops the list. Fanny composed this song in 1873 when a friend Mrs. Joseph Knapp visited Fanny, and played the tune on the piano in her room. Hearing the tune the blind lady dictated words of this famous song sung all over the world.

Charles Wesley, younger brother of Rev. John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Church), has the second place in the *Guinness Book*. He has composed 6,000 songs. Charles Wesley lived more than a century earlier than Fanny Crosby. He was born on December 18, 1707 and died on March 29, 1788. Among his many

songs I have been enjoying the following three songs. Only the first stanzas are reproduced below.

1. Hark, the herald angels sing
"Glory to the new born king,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild;
God and sinners reconciled."
2. O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His Grace.
3. Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down;
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.

The 18th century record of 6,000 songs set up by the Englishman Charles Wesley has been broken more than a century later by an American blind lady with her 3500. I think the time has not yet come for another genius to be born to break this record. So after having written about 120 songs I gave up the hope of finding a place in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Moreover my enthusiasm for a place in the Guinness Book vanished when I heard that one Rappai (Raphael is transliterated to Rappai in Malayalam) from my hometown, Trichur, is trying for an entry into the *Guinness Book* as the greatest eater. A week ago I heard him on the Radio answering questions on his capacity to eat. He claims that his regular dinner is only thrice that of an ordinary man's dinner. But whenever he has been challenged, he has eaten fifty times or more than what an

average person could consume. At present he has earned more than three lakhs (three hundred thousand) rupees by defeating the predictions of mortals who would guess how much a human belly could hold.

Thirty three-year-old Rajan Mahadevan from Mangalore, has a phenomenal memory. He found a place in the *Guinness Book* after quoting from memory 31,811 figures in July 1981. In 1987, however, a certain Japanese broke Mahadevan's record, memorising figures upto 40,000. As Mahadevan lost his place in the *Guinness Book*, he is trying for a come-back. He is attempting not only to double the forty thousand record, but to reach a hundred thousand figures so that nobody in any country will be able to surpass him.

Memory will be a boon for music masters. A musician has to memorise music notes. Some of them will have the notes, printed or written, placed in front of them. But while one plays an instrument or conducts an orchestra, it is not convenient to turn pages of the notes. I have found it difficult to play sitar and to turn the pages of the notes of different *Ragas* which I play.

The Italian music conductor Arturo Toscanini could remember the musical scores and librettos of hundreds operas and every note for every instrument in 250 symphonic works—a record which, I guess, no conductor can compete.

CHAPTER 6

For Social Causes

Priests are expected to only perform the rituals in the church and visit the members of their parish. This concept has been challenged today than ever before by some clergy as well as laity. They do not want to preach to the empty stomachs. Some people see their God as the giver of food and other physical needs. We are in this world, although not of the world. Jesus fed 4,000 men (Matthew 15:38) and 5000 men (John 6th Chapter) in addition to many unnumbered women and children.

We are called to plan programmes that would help our parishioners to care for the needs of their families. We have attempted several developmental programmes such as giving houses for the homeless, distributing sewing machines arranging loans from Banks, teaching printing technology free of charge, and helping with small loans.

The concept of social service has changed in recent years. From the mere acts of relief and charity we have shifted our emphasis to development. Several seminars are held. Small groups are organized to help themselves.

The Church's Auxiliary for Social Action based in New Delhi gave me opportunities to be of some help to

the Churches in India in the field of development. Being one of the "founding fathers" of the newly registered Indian CASA, I served on its National Board. During my term 1987-91 I served as its Vice Chairman.

The CASA dug about 25 borewells last year in a village near Trichur. That costs about half a million rupees (US \$ 26,000). Our Church, on its own, cannot afford to spend so much money on social service. The income of our Church is just enough to pay our priests and meet our today expenses. For such expenses we do not anticipate any foreign funds. But, for social service organizations like CASA, we depend on foreign funds. The beneficiaries are not Christians alone. CASA's service is for the poor people of our nation, irrespective of caste or creed.

The Mar Thimotheus Birth Centenary Technical Training Centre in Trichur where this book (like some of my other books) is printed is a project funded by the World Council of Churches, Geneva, recommended by CASA. We are able to teach the crafts of composition, proof reading, printing and binding and equip the students to pass the certificate course in printing technology. The grant of a little over half a million rupees provided the funds for purchasing the printing machine and pay for the instructors, thus providing free training for a batch of twenty students every year. It is indeed a boon for youngsters seeking jobs. Most of the students of the training centre are from outside our Church.

Emphasis has ever been on development. Instead of investing huge sums of foreign money on projects, a policy was adopted to educate people with concepts of development in order to involve more and more people

Several conferences with a thrust on development were held. In my hometown Trichur some young people planned a Leadership Training programme and organized conferences for the women and the youth with the financial assistance from the CASA.

The Syrian Orthodox Church organized Clergy Conference financed by CASA. Twice I had the opportunity to give leadership to such clergy conferences of this sister Church. They like my jokes. They had always thought that being a conservative, liturgical Church the bishops and clergy were supposed to act as serious looking people. Whether the less-serious nature of my talks helped them or not in their pastoral ministry, is not known to me.

After the killer cyclone had hit Andhra Pradesh on November 17, 1977 I had gone to Bapatla-Guntur area, where developments projects were implemented. It was a great pleasure for me to visit those areas, after some years and see for myself the tremendous progress some of these villagers had made. The people who had hired cycle-rickshaws could buy and own them with the loan from the Andhra Bank. Instead of paying rent to some rich people daily, they were paying back their loan daily and after several months the cycle rickshaws belonged to them.

How proudly they showed us their Bank pass books! They had "savings" in their Bank Account. The men had given up drinking. Village committees were set up, consisting of women only, to conduct the trial of drunkards and pronounce judgements. As it was a great shame for a husband to stand on trial before his own wife

and the wives of his friends in that village, the drunkard shuddered at the thought of drinking and being caught in the act.

Success of these CASA programmes was not hundred per cent. In India it is frightfully difficult to educate illiterates and to eradicate ignorance and superstition. In some areas the male domination is so strong that no wife will question a husband even if he beats her after he is drunk.

Strict financial control on project money is another difficulty. Whether it is government or voluntary agencies' foreign funds, leakage is possible at various levels. Corruption is built-in in our system. Although one reads in newspapers, occasionally, that one engineer here is caught red handed taking money from a contractor or a doctor demanded money from a patient to attend to his sickness, these are only tips of the icebergs. After Independence corruption has steadily grown in India to greater proportions, which even the changes in the governments had not been able to curb.

When I attended a Consultative Group meeting of the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) in October 1990 in Bombay, the representatives of the donor agencies were more than delighted as the Director's Report was read. Some foreign delegates expressed their great satisfaction to hear the confession of the failures of CASA. They said, "we are not happy that CASA failed, but we are very happy to hear that CASA admits that they have failed in certain areas,"

"All human beings and organizations fail to achieve some of the goals they plan to achieve. There is nothing

wrong in such failures. It is a sign of a healthy growth," the foreigners stated. They were under the impression that the Indians never admitted their failures and shortcomings. As I sat listening to these jubilant comments at the apparent failures of the organization they subsidize, I realised that the Indians have understood the line of thinking of the foreign donors even before these representatives had expressed it publicly. There is a probability that these failures might have been deliberately focussed by the Indian counterparts in order to satisfy the foreign donors who were so unhappy so far, as they were not hearing of any failure. The Indian representatives knew that they would get more foreign funds to be used for more failures; so that in turn the donors would have greater pleasure of hearing about more failures.

Sewing Machines

I should record, for posterity, a project which had failures in my experience. Several lower-income people, especially unemployed girls wanted to acquire sewing machines. When I was approached to sponsor some sewing machines through bank loans, I readily agreed. It was not a novel idea. Some voluntary agencies had done it before. We decided to sponsor about 500 sewing machines.

A committee was formed from the Clergy Council under the nomenclature of Social Development Committee. I explained to the clergy that we should not expect any financial benefits from either the beneficiaries or the dealers who sell these machines. The loans are provided by the banks whose advantage is limited to the extent that the Church does the screening of the applicants, as

the Banks do not have sufficient staff to make enquiries regarding the solvency of such loan applicants.

The beneficiaries were taught by us that since they were getting these sewing machines without any security, they should pay back Rs. 30 per month, which is not difficult if they put the machines to their own use or for doing small job-works for their neighbours. It is a part-time home industry that can bring a small income to families where women do not have full time employment.

To cut the story short, I must state that more than 4,000 sewing machines were distributed. The total loan for 4,000 machines came to about 5 million rupees. I announced in jest during a public function when the sewing machines were distributed: "I am a millionaire now, not that I have a million with me, but that I owe a debt of five million rupees to the various banks in Trichur." I exhorted the beneficiaries not to make me a debtor of millions. If they had good intention to help themselves, this project could be a success. Otherwise, it would be an utter failure.

Some paid up their loans. But more and more people began to be defaulters. The Banks began to telephone to me to help them to recoup their money. The size of our plan had reached bigger proportions. Instead of 500, it became 4,000. It was not physically possible to reach people individually and persuade them to keep up their promise to repay the loan. Moreover, most of the beneficiaries were not our Church members. It was a good idea to help Muslims, Hindus and Christians of other denominations. But we had no moral control on them to persuade them to keep their promise.

It reached a stage when I had to admit my helplessness with regard to the repayment of the loans. I told them to take action on the beneficiaries and not on me who is neither a beneficiary nor a guarantor. The story is not yet complete, as many loans are not yet recovered.

Some people kept on telling this people that the banks would write off these debts. These false assurances made them to go back on their promise. Maybe the nationalized banks may write-off the unpaid loans as bad debts. But the other Banks in Trichur which gave loans would recover the whole amount by resorting to the Revenue Recovery rules.

There are other complaints. One is that the secretary of the committee, a young clergyman, received commission for the purchase of each sewing machine. Although the secretary had denied this charge, the doubt still lingers in the minds of the people. In India, most purchases have some discounts. Sometimes it is open, but in other cases it is under the table. We cannot prove it. Unless the people we deal with are honest, these purchases can bring a lot of money under the table. This "commission" has become a big scandal. "Bofors" is only one example. It is not easy to prove these underground dealings even for the sleuths in the Intelligence Bureau.

The sewing machine affair has made me reluctant in getting involved in projects for helping the poor. I know that is not right to be inactive when our inertness prevents some good to the less privileged people. Yet, fresh from the failure of this five million loan, I am not

easily persuaded to leap into projects which are likely to bring me financial or moral liability.

Housing Loan

Food, clothing and shelter are the three slogans which the political leaders claim to provide for all the citizens, if we vote them to power. In spite of the changes of the political parties in power at the centre and the states they have failed to fulfil these promises made liberally at the time of elections.

Nevertheless, a housing scheme was launched by the government of Kerala to build small houses costing Rs. 6000 each. The Church came forward with Rs. 1000, the beneficiary took Rs. 1000. The government provided Rs. 1000. The remaining Rs. 3000 was offered by the government not as a grant but as a loan to be repaid in instalments. The deed of the land where this Rs. 6000 house was to be built had to be deposited with the government as security. The plan is perfect if people paid back the loan. Most of them, paid back the loan and took back the deed. Some paid back the loans, even earlier than the due date in order to obtain the title deed from the Housing Board, and to sell the house and make a profit.

Anyhow I am happy that we gave Rs. 27,000 for 27 houses. We recommended some more cases which came afterwards, without paying our share of Rs. 1000 as the Church funds for housing was already exhausted.

Leprosy Hospital

I had no knowledge of the work among leprosy patients when I was first approached to start a leprosy

hospital with aid from the Leprosy Relief Work, Berne, Switzerland. In spite of my initial hesitation to be directly involved in any project with big funds, whether foreign or Indian, my conscience compelled me to answer to this call to serve these unfortunate people in our society.

Three acre of land was purchased and a hospital building costing one and a half million rupees was constructed. The Emmaus Suisse Leprosy Relief Work in Berne funded the whole project. My duty was to be the Honorary Director of this Mar Timotheus Health & Leprosy Centre.

During my visit to Freiburg, Germany to read a paper on the Oriental Canon Law Conference in Oct. 1983, I visited the headquarters of this agency in Berne, Switzerland. Mr. Ferine, the then President of the organization (He is now retired), gladly received me and enquired about the project we had just begun. He had advised me against investing in hospital building. He said that the leprosy patients did not need much hospital care. They could be treated at home. In case of reaction-patients, they could be admitted in the government hospital. He is right. It costs a lot of money for constructing hospitals. Yet our project would look incomplete without a hospital building. Hence we insisted on a big hospital other than the small building we had as the headquarters for our operations, such as monitoring the work of the survey which our para medical workers were conducting.

Recommendations of Mr. William Gershon (an Indian with a German name and German wife), who was then co-ordinator of their work in India (now he works at Wurzburg for the German Leprosy Relief Association),

persuaded our funding agency to decide in favour of financing the construction of the hospital.

Mr. Rossenfeld who was the general Secretary of this organization then (he succeeded Mr. Ferine as the President last year) came to Kerala to see the hospital building. The Europeans are strict with regard to how the money they give is spent. They do not tolerate even a slight alteration of a plan approved by them. Some people get a plan approved and after the funds are received, they make certain changes in the plan to save funds. Therefore I appreciate their strictness with regard to the funds and the manner in which the money is spent.

Armed with a plan prepared by us and approved by them, Mr. Rossenfeld walked from room to room watching everything and missing nothing. When we reached a room he noticed that the position of a window in the room was changed. "Why is the window not in the place where it was supposed to be?" was the question from this tall man. Our project officer answered that there was a latrine just outside the place where it was originally shown in the plan. So for convenience we changed the position of the window a few feet away. This explanation did not satisfy him. His stubbornness began to bother our senior staff. Mr. Rossenfeld demanded that this window should be removed to the place as seen in the plan. Our unauthorised action in shifting the place would not be permitted.

How to change his mood? Was he really angry or was he pretending to be annoyed by this small change of position which did not matter much to the office in Berne. What we had done was not to save any money

for any one. The bosses in Berne should not have smelt rat. The local people would escape from the foul smell from the latrine by the change affected by us.

My sense of humour told me to crack a joke to change the seriousness of the situation. I told the story I heard about Bishop Pakenham Walsh, a Britisher who made India his home. Bishop Walsh went to attend a talk on leprosy. The doctor was talking about the visible symptoms of leprosy. The doctor explained. "If you have a copper coloured patch on your body, you scratch there. If you feel pain, then it is not leprosy. If you don't feel any sensation, it is likely to be leprosy. In that case, you check with a skin specialist and do treatment."

As the explanation of the doctor became clear in the mind of the Bishop he was reminded of a small coloured patch he had noticed on his right leg. He scratched his leg and a suspicion began to sneak into his mind. He could not feel any sensation. He shuddered at the thought that the patch on his right leg was leprosy. He told his wife seated next to him, "Dear, I think, I have got leprosy." Without sharing her husband's anxiety, she calmly questioned him as to why he thought that he had leprosy. The shivering bishop replied: "You see I am scratching on my right leg and I do not feel any sensation! I think it is leprosy." Laughingly she said: "Yes, you are scratching my left leg by mistake!"

Mr. Rossenfeld suddenly burst into laughter. He insisted that I should send the book *Laugh With the Bishop* as soon as it was released from the Press. Yes, the whole atmosphere of tension vanished. We were able to discuss things in a more relaxed mood. For the information of

my readers I must warn that it may work with some people sometimes and you cannot fool (or tell a joke to) all people all the time.

We have the satisfaction that we have cured about 2000 leprosy patients through our work in less than ten years. My responsibility covered a population of two lakhs (2,00,000.) The sickness rate is only one per cent.

We also managed to obtain permission for a general section. It is partly to be self sufficient. We cannot charge leprosy patients who are often poor. But there are other patients who could be charged. Moreover this kind of integration helps to eradicate the stigma attached to leprosy. When the ordinary patients go to the same hospital they will learn it for themselves that leprosy is no more a dreaded disease, but a curable one like any other diseases.

One day visiting this project at Thathamangalam I was moved to write a song of seven stanzas in Malayalam and then translated into English in the same tune. All the 28 lines had eight syllables each. The Malayalam version was made use of during our health education programme. The song goes like this :

1. Leprosy is an old disease
But not an incurable one
It can be healed completely,
If you can treat it willingly.
2. It is indeed a vile disease
But not at all a divine curse
Like many other disease
By treatment you can get cures.

3. In several other countries
They eradicated this disease
Let us too try to eradicate
From India also this disease.
4. Through the air, water and food
This disease doesn't ever spread
Without any inkling of fear
Let the patients be cared for.
5. As for these skin diseases
As soon as it ever appears
Approach the doctor you quickly
And you get cured completely.
6. The tablet known as "Dapsone"
If you take it regularly
Within some years four or a five
Will be healed well and perfectly.
7. Oh Brethren you collectively
Now co-operate sincerely
In India without leprosy
Let us live ever happily.

My concept of the size of an ideal hospital is a small one. I had to sell this idea to my staff. We always want big things. But men of experience had told me that we should not grow beyond our means. It is difficult to manage big hospitals. The Christian Medical College & Hospital in Vellore, Tamilnadu is a huge hospital with 1000 beds. As a referral hospital this may be justified. It is also a prestigious hospital. For the Christian minority community in India this hospital has been a

point of contact with the elite in the Hindu and Muslim society.

CMC & H, Vellore has become the last word in the medical profession. Senior staff serve there for a much lower salary than what the students they had trained got elsewhere. It is a prestige to be advertised as "retired from C. M. C, Vellore" or "trained at C. M. C, Vellore." The staff at Vellore commands respect in society.

I am happy to be a member of the governing body of the C. M. C. & H, Vellore. Eminent men are there. Twice a year we meet in council. My participation in it for over a decade, has been genuine education for me. Once they invited me to lead a pre-selection retreat for the faculty. I cracked a lot of jokes and made them laugh. Somebody asked, "Do you call it a retreat?"

Christians have three medical colleges in India. C. M. C. & H, Vellore is topmost with plenty of sophisticated medical gadgets and an eminent team of doctors. The second medical college the Protestants started is the Christian Medical College at Ludhiana, Punjab. The CMC, Ludhiana is not on a par with C. M. C. & H, Vellore.

The St. John's Medical College, Bangalore is the only Medical College the Roman Catholics have begun to build up less than three decades ago—I remember visiting this college, in 1964 when my cousin Tony Panengat was studying there. Without a pucca building they had operated a Medical College from scrap. The determination of the Catholic community to own a Medical College coupled with liberal foreign funding

de it a story of success. A priest, not a medical doctor, is the Director of St. John's Medical College. In spite of the stiff opposition from the non-Christian community in Karnataka state and the lethargy of the Government in according recognition to the medical course of St. John's Medical College, they grew to prominence in the medical field passing successfully through the teething trouble. Although St. John's is old chronologically it has attained a place of excellence above C. M. C., Ludhiana.

Fr. Percival Fernandes Ph. D, the Director of the St. John's Medical College, sits next to me during the Council meetings of C. M. C. & H, Vellore and cracks jokes. It was he who suggested the title to my third book of humour *Laugh To Health*. If my memory is correct he had suggested "*Laugh To Good Health*". But by my simple reasoning I thought the word 'Health' was good enough without the epithet "good" prefixed to it.

Small hospitals in our rural areas are blessings to the ordinary people. Big metropolitan hospitals are expensive. More sophisticated equipments, expert doctors and expensive medicines are readily available there. But many sick people have to manage with a small rural hospital in the neighbourhood. For expert treatment by specialists they can be referred to a referral hospital in a city or in a Medical College, where better facilities are available.

In my hometown I find a tendency for the rich to rush to the Medical College or expensive hospitals where modern marvels of the medical science such as total body scanner are available.

Defending the cause of small rural hospitals, even in an affluent nation like the U. S. A., Richard J. Margolis in an article under the cute caption "Caring and Curing" in SPAN (March 1991) has this to say: (p. 5)

"I had set out to learn about small hospitals because I had heard they were an endangered species. I wanted to see what we as a nation stood to lose if we allowed these modest facilities, largely hidden from metropolitan eyes, to vanish. From a rural perspective, of course, such a loss would be catastrophic, not only in terms of the local residents' health (and the local economy) but also in terms of their pooled pride. For there is something about a small town hospital in America that can inspire an altogether refreshing awareness of civic consequence. As a housewife who has lived all her life in Independence, Iowa (population: 6,150), reminded me, "It's simply a matter of our self-respect'. A town that loses its hospital has one less thing to be proud of."

In personal relationship the rural hospital has greater facilities to offer to the customers. A patient is a person with a name and identity in a small hospital instead of "the patient in Bed No. 5 in the Ward No. X on the 4th floor." The nurses know the patients and even the names of the relatives. The article in the SPAN quoted above dwells upon this concern: (P. 4)

"Do you do anything special for bereaved families?" I asked a nurse at Grant Memorial Hospital, a 59-bed facility tucked into the mountains surrounding Petersburg, West Virginia.

The nurse gave the question considerable thought. "No," she finally answered, "I don't recall our ever doing anything out of the ordinary for the bereaved. Oh, sure, we cry with them and we sing with them and we pray with them. But no, nothing you could call special."

A rural American hospital, then, may be a place where nothing "special" ever happens. Where no one is a number; where everyone knows your name, tolerates your quirks and shares your griefs; where the nurses celebrate your birthday. Where, when you telephone to say you feel sick and wish to be admitted, they turn down your bed and have the florist deliver a half-dozen pink carnations to your room. Where visiting hours do not matter even if they are posted—relatives and friends come and go as they please; where a turned-on light over your door instantly brings a nurse to your bedside."

CHAPTER 7

Reminiscences

This volume is the second part, covering my age between 40 and 50. It is beyond the purview of this work to record anecdotes of my childhood. The lack of such description of my early childhood will create a vacuum in this book.

Reading about the childhood of K. P. S. Menon, in his autobiographical masterpiece *Many Worlds Revisited*, I began to reminisce regarding the fear of ghosts haunting me. My house was near the cemetery of the Anglican Church (after Independence of India, Church of South India) and I had some fear when I looked into the cemetery, before going to bed, from the open terrace of the house where we used to sleep during the hot nights of the summer months. During my younger days I was warned by the older ones not to look in that direction before going to sleep lest I dreamt of ghosts. As I fail to recall any specific instance I shall take the liberty to quote how the young K. P. S. Menon managed this problem, often faced by children even today. (p. 9)

“I lay awake, my imagination full of ghosts. I was too proud to wake up my mother and say that I was afraid. I then passed water on the bed and woke up my mother and said that Chandran, my

younger brother, had done it. My mother did it exactly as I thought she would. She scolded Chandran and asked me to climb into her bed and sleep by her side, and I still remember the peace and bliss of that sleep. My ruse was so successful that I repeated it on another day so as to be able to sleep in peace, hugging my mother. Again Kaniyar was summoned. He was informed that my younger brother had a tendency to pass urine in his sleep. Kaniyar prescribed some medicine and, at the same time, recommended that Chandran should be made to walk between the legs of an elephant. This was done in my presence. Seeing the fear in Chandran's eyes, I was stricken with remorse and went and confessed to my mother that it was all my doing."

When I was just ten years old I used to read *Express*, a Malayalam daily published from Trichur. The news of the Korean war used to excite me. On June 25, 1950 North Korea launched an unexpected attack on South Korea. Almost 75,000 troops marched across the 38th parallel. Against this American version of the story, the North Koreans claimed that they were just taking defensive action against South Korea.

On the same day the Security Council met at the request of the U. S. A. and condemned the action of the North Koreans. Two days later President Harry. S.Truman announced that he ordered the U. S. A. Air and Naval Forces to go to Korea to support Syngman Rhee, President of South Korea. John Foster Dulles, consultant to the U.S. Secretary of State, had already gone to South Korea exactly one week prior to this attack.

Although I was only ten years old I learned the names of the U. S. President (Harry Truman), John Foster Dulles and General Mc Arthur, the Commander of the U. S. forces in Korea. Every morning soon after morning family prayer I ran out to pick up the *Express* and to find out how deep into the North Korean territory the American army had penetrated.

Syngman Rhee's army was losing. On 15 September America had landed 50,000 men equipped with tanks and artillery to support Rhee's army. Some 800 aircraft and 300 naval ships provided the cover for this operation. The North Korea had a 70,000 strong army. The UN force was double the strength of North Korean army. On October 25, 1950 Chinese volunteers began to support North Korean army. At that time I had put my confidence in the mighty American army, especially the navy and waited to read that the South Koreans won the battle. How many lives were lost in the power game between the super powers !

To my ten year old mind, there was no rhyme or reason for the war. Still I do not know why I was excited to read the war news. It is true that I am a war baby in the sense I was born during the World War II. A few months before I was born my father's sister Rosa was married to a doctor Pavunny (Paul). Soon after the marriage, Dr. P. A. Paul joined the army medical core and left. He was captured by the Japanese and was a prisoner of war in Japan. When war was over in 1945, Captain P.A Paul was released. Although 5 years old then, I remember the day we received our uncle Captain P.A. Paul back in Trichur. Latewards he became a Major, then a Lt. Col. and retired as a full Colonel, as Asst Director of Medical Services, in Delhi. His son Sadeep is now a Major in the Military Engineering Service.

Although I used to boast of the general knowledge possessed and for which I obtained first prize in the general knowledge competition in the school when I was 11 years old, I feel I have become a total *ignoramus* today, when knowledgeable people discuss about cricket scores or when school children mention the name of the ex-husband of their favourite cine actress and the six figure remuneration a super star demands for acting in a two-hour movie. Please don't ask me how many hours an actor takes for acting in a two-hour movie or an actress takes for her make-up. The students of today know it. They get all these information from the TV, Radio, newspapers and cinema magazines.

I am not a voracious reader. But I do attempt reading both sacred and secular literature. Not only newspapers but also periodicals and books I read. I do not get glued in the train journey to a thick paperback. I do not spend much money buying all the good books I see in the bookshops. It is not easy to find enough time to sit in the library and read books.

My reading habit does not befit a scholar or an author. As one who nurses an ambition to be a successful writer, I should mend my ways and improve my reading habits, to make it deeper and wider. There is no limit to reading. To my young readers my advice is to take note of important points or poems which then will find useful for quoting in private conversations or public utterances. If one has to quote them in writing it is important that we jot down the page number of the book or date of magazines as we are not to mark in the margins of the books in the libraries.

In my personal copies of books or magazines I mark them with a pencil to be seen easily later. Although some people advise against marking either in the margin or in the text, I am not fully convinced of their arguments. To me, marking in the margin, and in rare cases in the text, has been helpful. I hope that it will be helpful for the readers of the next generation to learn what had attracted me.

Today I marked the first stanzas of the two poems I read in the SPAN, dated March 1991, P. 46. These are poems penned by Claude McKay, the black Jamaican-American poet (1889-1948). The first one titled *America* attracted me as I have studied in New York and Princeton during 1968-69. The second one *A Memory of June* captured my attention because I was born in June.

America

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth;
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.

A Memory of June

When June comes dancing on the death of May,
With scarlet roses tinting her green breast,
And mating thrushes ushering in her day,
And Earth on tiptoe for her golden guest.
I always see the evening when we met-
The first of June baptized in tender rain-

And walked home through the side streets,
gleaming wet,
Arms locked, our warm flesh pulsing with love's,
pain.

A good systematic method of taking notes and filing them under topics is essential to any reader especially for a writer. Similarly one should have plenty of clippings from newspapers and periodicals which will be useful at the time of writing books or articles.

Mr. Paul T. Varghese, who was Principal of the Chaldean Syrian College in Trichur, found a useful purpose of the extra diaries he had got. He cut out and pasted many interesting articles from foreign publications in his extra diaries. After his death his wife sent some of his books and "diaries" to me. I found these "diaries" very useful. How carefully he has collected "clippings" and pasted them! He has also underlined several sentences using different colour pencils. I wish I did such collecting and pasting. But I hesitate to use scissors on the pages of the periodicals I get down. I usually have them bound. It will be awkward to have these bound volumes with many mutilated pages with holes at the bottom, top or middle.

The emphasis today is on the money a writer or a publisher can make. Therefore the books do not contain enough information. The author does not do his homework. He attempts to pen his thoughts without fortifying his arguments with sound reasoning. One excuse authors often make is that the readers are not upto their intellectual level. They are satisfied with the quick stuff the writers produce. It is said that scholarly Henry

Kissinger demanded a drastic trimming on a 2000 word document prepared by a Pentagon staffer on the argument that President (Nixon) could not digest anything more complicated than a *Reader's Digest* article.

I do not entertain any exalted idea about an adept use of English language on my part. I do not possess flowery style. Therefore I was intrigued when I received a letter from the Shivaji University Department of English in Kolhapur requesting my permission to use my article published in the *Indian Church History Review*. The article was entitled "The relation of the Church in Kerala and the East Syrian Church in India from 1787-1860 A.D "

"A Computer Corpus of Indian English for use with digital Computers, comparable to the existing 'Brown Corpus' of American English and 'LOB Corpus' of British English" was the project the English Department of this Indian University was preparing. My article was selected to be one of the "500 samples of 2000 words each, distributed over a wide variety of types and styles of prose printed during the year 1978." The University says this "Corpus lexical and stylistic studies of Indian English as compared to the native varieties."

As I was delighted that my article was selected to be one of the 500 samples of Indian English, I instantly gave permission to the University. Then I boasted about my English in the following Church History Conference. Dr. F. S. Downs of Bangalore queried which of my article was selected to the Corpus of the Indian English. When I replied that it was my article in the *Indian Church History Review*, he laughed and said: "It is not a sample of Indian English. That article may

sample of American English. Because, being the editor of the *Indian Church History Review*, I have touched on your language." Dr. Downs is an American and perhaps the students using my article in the "Computer Corpus of Indian English" may detect some foreignness in my Indian English.

As a matter of fact, I have never been a student of English literature. When I wrote my thesis for Master of Theology degree at the United Theological College, Professor Rev. Dr. Kaaj Baago (who later ceased to be a Reverend and became Danish Ambassador to India and died in New Delhi following a massive cardiac arrest) made his candid comment: "Your English is archaic. What books are you reading? Since your subject is Church history you are using language prevalent in the past. Try to be a little more current in your style and diction."

Dr. Baago was right. I told him that when I spent the year in England (1961-62) I spent all my spare time reading books on the Assyrian Church written in English of the 19th century. Some of these books such as George Badger's *Nestorians and Rituals*, 2 volumes, were rare and out of print. Therefore I read in the Lambeth Palace Library, St. Augustine's College, Canterbury and in other libraries where I could find these out-of-print books of the 19th century.

English language in England and America is not exactly the same. In America (in India too), one who plays a flute is a flutist. But in England he is a flautist. In India one's wife's sister's husband is a co-brother. But in England, he is called brother-in-law. The word co-brother was coined in India. When a friend introduced

his wife's sister's husband to me and said he was his co-brother, I thought he was a half brother, i. e. his father's second wife's son. Now in India when people say co-brother I understand. But if I use that word in England, they would stare at me confused, wondering how Indians had murdered the language of their former masters.

A stray remark or some personal experiences teach us many lessons. In our sub-conscious mind they influence our future course of action. We judge others, sometimes wrongly, biased or prejudiced by the opinions expressed by others. Clever, sometimes crooked people, deliberately throw information on to our mind in order to influence our opinion in their favour or against somebody.

In November 1919 Jawaharlal Nehru, who later became the first Prime Minister of India, was travelling in a train on an upper berth from Amritsar to Delhi. Brigadier Dwyer was in the same compartment. He was boasting how he had taught "the bloody browns a lesson", as he was returning after testifying before the committee enquiring into the Jallianwalabagh massacre. The boast of the British officer made a traumatic impact on the young Nehru, who had learned law in England and had faith in the British brand of justice.

Drinking

There was a toddy (local drink fermented from palm sap) shop near our house. Every evening people drunk with toddy walked past our house. We made fun of them. They used abusive language. I grew up with the notion that drinking is bad to everybody. Therefore, I simply

use company at a dinner or on a visit to somebody. In the house whenever I visit, my host comes with his bottle. He knows I do not touch, even a drop, even for company's sake. My temperance is a silent message to him. He claims that by taking drinks he gets the courage to talk anything to everyone at any time. He thinks that drinking is essential to be successful in life.

One day losing all my patience I began to talk back. I took the courage to hit back at a drunkard without drinking a drop of liquor. As long as I knew that I was right, I had the moral courage to retort and to insist on my point of view. I strongly believe that whatever courage one may gain by drinking, he stands to lose in the long run.

Excessive drinking is a great vice. A successful man is doomed to failure by drinking. Social drinking for company's sake" is also bad. We drag many well-meaning men to occasional drinking. People tried to drag me to that habit, without success, during my studies in England and America, and even in India after becoming a bishop. I was willing to be branded unsophisticated and non-sociable.

RICHARD BLUMMER wrote:

We drink for joy and become miserable.
We drink for sociability and become argumentative.
We drink for sophistication and become obnoxious.
We drink to help us sleep and awake exhausted.
We drink for exhilaration and end up depressed.
We drink to gain confidence and become afraid.

We drink to make conversation flow and become
incoherent.

We drink to diminish our problems and see them
multiply

Some people consider drinking a status symbol. It is a sad situation that educated people also gradually take to drinking. Some say beer is not bad. It is a soft drink. The Kerala government has it as a policy to open more beer parlours to wean people away from hard liquor. The statement of Mr. Derek Rutherford, Director, Institute of Alcohol Studies in London, who visited Kerala in April 1991 is a warning to us all. He said: (as reported in *Indian Express*, dated April 11, 1991, p. 3.)

If India is throwing open more liquor outlets, the country would have an alcohol explosion soon. And you do not need a crystal ball to see the end result, for there are nearly 40,000 premature deaths every year in the UK from the misuse of alcohol.

The greatest number of problems comes from acute intoxication, impairment and consumption of alcohol at the wrong time.

If the bulk of your revenue is from liquor, then you have a lovely comparison in France. The Ministry of Health there is spending about 40 per cent of its revenue for fighting alcohol-related disabilities.

According to him, the major cause of death in the age group 18-24 in the UK is an alcohol-related accident. In more than 30 per cent of all divorce petitions, women

cite alcohol as the factor. Nearly 20 per cent of 16-year old boys and 10 per cent of 15-year-old girls in the UK are alcohol addicts.

Although Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues advocated total prohibition in India, we could not implement it after Independence. It failed in some states where it was enforced; because people went for illicit liquor to quench their 'thirst.' Many died also due to consumption of the poisonous illicit liquor. Mr. Rutherford's following observation is correct and should persuade Indian politicians to resist the pressure of the liquor barons in India and save our country from the evils of drinks.

The freedom-fighters of India would not have welcomed what is happening in the country today. They held the view that not only do you need to be free from the British, but the people needed to be kept away from the bottle as well.

Supreme blunder

In my personal reminiscence I feel compelled to record a Himalayan blunder. I call it a Supreme blunder, because it was related to the Supreme Court of India. It was not a blunder of the Supreme Court, it was owing to my lack of knowledge regarding the location of the Supreme Court of India.

December 1989 was fixed for the final disposal of an appeal which my opponents had filed against the judgement of the Division Bench of the High Court of Kerala declaring the suspension of my predecessor Mar Thoma

Darmo as null and void. After nearly fifteen years in the file of the Supreme Court of India, it matured for hearing and disposal.

My people in Trichur suggested that I should be present at the Supreme Court in Delhi. My lawyer, Mr. C. V. Francis, however, did not agree with this suggestion. At the insistence of our people in Trichur, taking advantage of my presence in Delhi to attend a CASA meeting, I was reluctantly persuaded to be present at the Supreme Court.

Moreover, I have the experience of being an international witness, a V. I. P., (as Australian television interviewed me twice, in the airport as well as in the Supreme Court) in the Supreme Court of New South Wales at the state capital Sydney. (In Australia the Highest court is the High Court at the federal capital i. e., Canberra. The Supreme Court is supreme only at the state level. I do not know why the Australians and the Indians think so differently).

Upon arrival in Delhi I telephoned to my lawyer to tell him of my intention to be present inside the Supreme Court when the Church case would come up for final disposal. The lawyer tried to dissuade me from going over to the court as it is below the dignity or decorum of an ecclesiastical head. As I told him that it was just to satisfy my people in Trichur, he agreed to get a guest pass to enter the court of the Chief Justice as our case was posted to the court of the Chief Justice and another judge. He instructed me that as soon as I reach the Supreme Court, I should ask for the Court of the Chief Justice where Mr. Francis would be waiting for me with

the entry pass. I should not enter the court without this pass. He was sure that the case would be heard that Friday which was the final Friday before the retirement of the Chief Justice.

After attending the CASA meeting I offered my apology to leave early to be present at the Supreme Court. They were kind enough not only to permit me to leave early, but also offer me a "lift" to the Supreme Court. One officer called a driver and told him to drop me at the Supreme Court. Within minutes we were on our way.

Since it was my first visit to a civil court in India I sat in the jeep quietly reminiscing. I thought of this case filed in 1965 against my predecessor and how I was impleaded after his death on 7 Sept. 1969 inspite of my protests. The opponents insisted that I should be impleaded and the District Judge of Trichur ruled accordingly.

When we reached in front of a busy court, my driver stopped and said, "This is it." I did not wait to enquire further. I walked in. The lawyers were busy canvassing votes for the Bar Association election. I told them that I was not a lawyer and have no vote for the Bar Association election. One lawyer told me, "No, you definitely look like a lawyer, please vote for our candidates." He gave me the list of his candidates. My ecclesiastical robes must have confused this lawyer. He only wanted my vote.

"Would you kindly show me the court of the Chief Justice?" I requested. They showed me the court at the top, i. e., the third floor. I waited at the door for my lawyer, Mr. Francis. He did not show up.

I was worried that the Chief Justice would sit with his companion judge and call our case. If my lawyer was caught up in a Delhi traffic jam, my case would be decided *ex-parte*, maybe against me. I said to myself that such a thing should not happen.

I walked inside the court room. The armed guard did not stop me. He, like the earlier lawyer must have thought that I was a lawyer, in my episcopal robes. The Chief Justice started hearing the petitions. A senior Supreme Court lawyer began to argue his case vehemently. The Companion Judge told the agitated lawyer, "Mr. Lekhi, you don't have to teach the Bench what the law is." The lawyer retorted : "In some cases the bench has to learn from the Bar."

When I heard the name of Mr. Lekhi, I knew that it was the Supreme Court where I was supposed to be in. I had read in newspapers the name of this lawyer in connection with the civil suits connected with the late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Still I looked around for my lawyers and the opponents' lawyers. I asked a junior advocate where Dr. Chitale, the senior advocate engaged to plead for my side, was. He couldn't say. Nobody is helpful, I felt. I tried to telephone; but Mr. Francis was not in his office.

Has the hearing been postponed? Where are my opponents even if the lawyers of my side are absent? These questions passed through my mind. I decided to argue the case myself. The Chief Justice and the companion judge began to look in my direction. They must be wondering why I fixed my eyes on them.

One by one, the cases were called. Mr. Lekhi left after his "sound and fury", perhaps not signifying much. At lunch break I searched for my lawyers as well as my opponents. Nobody was seen. I guessed my opponents were hiding some where just to appear at the appropriate time and get the case *ex-parte* at the absense of my lawyers. Was my lawyer kidnapped on his way to the court? Or, has any accident occurred on the way? If it is a traffic jam he should show up by the afternoon at least.

I got ready to say, "Your Lordship", if my case was called; as my lawyer had assured me that it would be taken up definitely that day. About 3 p.m. the Chief Justice got up from his seat, the companion Judge also got up and disappeared into their private chambers. I came out of the empty court room and looked at the flights of stair cases down. Should I walk down those winding staircases or take a "lift" quickly down. Where to? What for?

Slowly I slugged down the long winding stairs. I felt giddy. I walked out of the court. I saw an autorickshaw coming. I hopped in and proceeded to the CASA office to join my colleagues. When the autorickshaw stopped in front of the CASA office I got out and took the purse to pay him.

"Where did you pick me up from?" I asked the autorickshaw driver in my broken Hindi. He stared at me thinking that I was a nut? I clarified, "Listen, you know the Court from where I hired you. Was it the Supreme Court or High Court?" He replied, "Obviously it was the Delhi High Court." I hopped into his vehicle again and shouted, "To the Supreme Court." He looked at me

in surprise. "You could have told me earlier. It was easy to go from the High Court to the Supreme Court" said he. I explained to him my predicament. He drove fast and dropped me in front of the Supreme Court. It was not a modern-looking building like the High Court where I went earlier.

"Where is your pass?" I was stopped at the entrance of the Chief Justice's Court. I explained that my case is called inside, I guessed. My pass is in the pocket of my lawyer Mr. Francis who was inside the court. The peon at the door assured me that my case would not come up that day. The earlier numbers posted for that day are not finished. Yet I wanted to go in.

My lawyer had gone inside after waiting for me for a long time. He had actually gone at lunch break to the canteen of the High Court itself where I had been waiting. But he did not look for me there, because he wouldn't ever anticipate that I would go to the High Court when I had known for sure that my case was in the Supreme Court.

After a few minutes of waiting outside the main entrance, the door was opened and the lawyers marched out. As I had guessed they were arguing my case. The opponents came and they saw me outside greeting my lawyer. They must have thought that it was my strategy deliberately planned not to be present in the court, but to hear from the horse's mouth about the proceedings as soon as it was over. As I had to fly back within one hour I discussed the situation over a cup of tea at the Supreme Court canteen. My absence was not a calculated scheme, but a Himalayan blunder or a "Supreme" blunder.

Colour of my cassock

The *PROBE* magazine interviewed me for an article on our Church in Trichur. It was a lengthy feature on micro communities. During the interview, the lady interviewer had a doubt about the significance of the colour of my cassock. It is usually the women who like colourful clothes. Men enjoy it, but do not wear coloured clothes often.

To her pleasant surprise I told her a secret i. e., the cassock I was wearing was the saree of my sister in England. During my visit to her [she enquired whether I would wear red coloured clothes, I replied that the bishops wear anything other than white cassocks. The Bishops wear coloured stuff. She showed me a new chiffon saree she had bought. When she understood from me that a cassock would take 5 yards of clothes, she realised that her saree would just be the right length.

I got a cassock stitched from her saree. My sister in the U.S.A. also gave me a saree for my cassock. The serious problem was these chiffon sarees were 'see-through'. As the women wrapped it three or four times (I do not know how many) around their body, it was okay. But when I stitched it as a cassock, it could show my under clothes. I had to take it back to my tailor to give it a lining.

I narrated this true story to the reporter. I am usually candid in my comments and she found it interesting. She wrote in her article that the bishop had no choice in the colour of his cassock [except to wear the sarees his sisters gave.

Oh! boy, what an uproar it made in the next Representative Council of our Church. Some of them felt hurt by this harmless observation which is true. They opined that it was a shame for the Church, if the public thought that this Church could not afford to pay for the clothes for a bishop. Why should I depend on the sarees of my sisters? Why should I tell, even if it is true?

Afterwards, whenever my sisters or brothers presented me with cloth for my cassock, they made it clear to me that it was not a saree; it was just ordinary material of the required size for me to stitch a cassock.

Our discussion on the colour of the cassock may be closed with the little poem I read on the topic. The author is unknown as is the case with some beautiful pieces of writing or songs. Perhaps, when it was originally written the author did not imagine that it would be printed and quoted thousands of times by others.

Blue is true,
Yellow's jealous,
Green's forsaken,
Red's brazen,
White is love,
And black is death.

Many clergymen in the West wear black suit not only for funerals, but also for weddings. Perhaps black is not death alone !

Without TV

TV, video, and now the prestigious and expensive cable TV have taken up much of the valuable leisure time

one has today. Therefore I am not in the least bothered when someone suggests that TV is indispensable for modern men to be up-to-date with the world events. I know, four of our clergymen who describe themselves as poorly paid have bought TV sets. Now they struggle hard to pay the instalments for the loan on the TV.

Even when a gift of a TV was offered, I said, "No, thank you", because I knew that my time to read and write books will be considerably reduced when TV comes into my life. I use radio for news. In addition to Indian news, I occasionally tune to B. B. C., Voice of America and Radio Moscow. At this stage I have a fear that gradually my apathy for TV will vanish and I will relax into my easy chair watching TV not only for the news but also for the musical programme of Ravi Shanker and others. Needless to mention that I will also watch if there are some funny programmes. I used to watch Bob Hope and company while I was studying in America (1966-68).

I am glad that some Indian friends are also realising that "reading as an engrossing and illuminating pastime has been eclipsed by the invasion of the electronic media." *The Illustrated Weekly of India* dated March 2-3, 1991 has this to say: (P. 19.)

"The TV and the video are gradually becoming a part of daily life. Both have, to some extent, brought about several changes in the home environment. Family life, good conversation, reflective analyses, silence, contemplation and above all, reading have all been forced to take a

back seat. The visual medium is so powerful a persuader and influencer that unless some immediate remedial measures are taken, it might permanently distort our values and priorities."

About Memoirs

When Harry S. Truman wrote his *Memoirs*, he packed a lot of information into the two volumes totalling 1274 pages. Nevertheless, he could not tell the whole story. He confessed: (*Memoirs*, Vol. I. p. X)

"For reasons of national security and out of consideration for some people still alive, I have omitted certain material. Some of this material cannot be made available for many years, perhaps for many generations".

This apology of President Truman is a pointer to the difficulties encountered by people in high positions. How much can one make it bare in public? What are the repercussions of such an action on an institution or persons who had supported the writer? It is difficult to be silent sometimes. At the same time it becomes necessary on some occasions.

The life of the President of the United States of America is not easy, writes Harry Truman in his *Memoirs*. He concludes a letter to Mamma & Mary dated 15 June, 1945 having been in that august office just for two months "How would you like to be the President des *Etats Unis*? It's a hell of a life."

I guess, several bishops also might make similar remarks when they are burdened with heavy work. Being

bishops, they may prefer to modify "It's a hell of a life" into "It's is a heaven of a life."

Memoirs or letters of great men are not only interesting but also informative indeed. In the *Memoirs* of President Harry S. Truman, there are several letters addressed to "Mamma & Mary." In his letter dated 23 July, 1945 written from Berlin, Truman tells us about a dinner entertainment. He writes: (*Memoirs*, Vol I, p 409).

Stalin gave his state dinner night before last, and it was a wow. Started with caviar and vodka and wound up with watermelon and champagne, with smoked fish, fresh fish, venison, chicken, duck, and all sorts of vegetables in between. There was a toast every five minutes until at least twenty-five had been drunk. I ate very little and drank less, but it was a colourful and enjoyable occasion.

When I had Stalin & Churchill here for dinner, I think I told you that a young sergeant named List from Philadelphia played the piano, and a boy from the Metropolitan Orchestra played the violin. They are the best we have, and they are very good. Stalin sent to Moscow and brought on his two best pianists and two female violinists. They were excellent. Played Chopin, Liszt, Tschaikowsky and all the rest. I congratulated him and them on their abilityIt was a nice dinner.

There is an interesting anecdote about the singing of the National anthem "God Save the King." It was played 16 or 17 times non-stop on Feb. 9, 1909 by a German military band on the platform of Rathenau

Railway Station upon the arrival of the British King. The *Guinness Book of World Records* states (P. 222) that such a repetition became necessary because "King Edward VII was struggling inside the train to get into his German Field-Marshal uniform before he could emerge."

We have information on the longest biography and autobiographical books. The *Guinness Book of World Records* records it as follows. (1988 edition, P. 206).

"The longest biography in publishing history is that of Sir Winston Churchill by his son Randolph (4,832 pages) and Martin Gilbert (13,830 pages) to date comprising some 8,214,000 words.

Georges Simenon (b Feb. 13, 1903, Liege, Belgium) wrote 22 autobiographical books from 1972 to date."

I have no ambition to break these records either by attempting a longer biography on some important personality or by attempting several autobiographical works.

Graham Greene passed away near Geneva, Switzerland on April 3, 1991, after this book had gone to the press. As his name is known to everybody knowing English. I was inspired to insert a few lines in this book. When Graham Greene died at the ripe age of 86, he had written only sixty books. I may reach the number after a decade if I keep up at the pace of two books a year. But the number does not tell the readers the volume of the content and quality of the works of Graham Greene. Most of my books are slimmer than this.

"*A Sort of Life*" published in 1971 is the autobiographical work of this great literary genius. He is a gift of England to the international literary circles. It is not easy to imitate his literary style. Besides the fact that English is his mother tongue, Graham Greene had been a voracious reader since his childhood. At the age of 14 when he read a novel "*A Viper of Milan*" written by Miss Marjorie Bewans, borrowed from the school library, he made up his mind to be a novelist. Along with that determination he trained himself to the task ahead of him.

Many travelogues, in addition to novels, he wrote. He was a journalist too. In addition to his autobiography "*A Sort of Life*," another book of his also helps us to have a peep into his life. It is "*Lost Childhood and other Essays*." In the literary field Graham Greene will remain an inspiration to many of us for years.

John Updike, the American novelist who was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer prize of America in April 1991, says how ideas multiply into sub-divisions and an author gets more books written. Actually he talks about 37 books, exactly the same number of books I have written. He says: (SPAN, April 1991, p. 18)

"Anyway, I completed the book; it was indeed a full-length book, too full-length to include with the horse novel, which I then made into another separate book. And that of course is the way we accumulate a shelf of books, every idea subdivides and becomes two and then four, and that way you can have written 37 books and not have had very many ideas,"

He is a moving American, a phenomenon about which I have mentioned in the second chapter of this book. His opinion is intriguing and interesting and hence is reproduced below. (op. cit, p. 18)

“When the time came, when 1979 came—each novel, by the way, was written in a different house, as it turned out, at a different address—I was in a different town, I had a different wife, a different sense of myself. I was full of beans, really, looking back on it from my present relatively beanless condition. I was in my mid-forties, just a kid. The town we lived in, I should say, was away from the sea and in size and social atmosphere reminded me of the town in Pennsylvania, Shillington, that I had grown up in. The house was even the same shape—long and narrow, with a deep backyard. From the room I wrote in, I saw rows of yellow school buses. I was at home in America all right.”

About the use of the present tense in making our writing vivid, John Updike has the following opinion to share with us. He writes: (op. cit, pp. 17, 18)

“I discovered as I began to write how delicious the present tense is. Instead of writing “she said and he said” it’s “he says and she says”, and not “he jumped” at some past moment, but “he jumps,” right now in front of you. Action takes on a wholly different, flickering quality; thought and feeling and event are brought much closer together,

And so the present tense proved to be a happy one and I wrote on and on in a little room in the corner of East Street and County Road in Ipswich, Massachusetts, a town I'd moved to in an attempt to get away from the charms and distractions of New York City. I was there provisionally, seeing if I could be a free-lance writer, I had a job in New York, I had done my New York thing, I could tell Uptown from Downtown, I had undergone the Manhattan initiation rites that writers should undergo, and was up in New England experimentally out on a limb as it were."

CHAPTER 8

Church Administration

Those who write my obituaries will not state, I hope, that I was an able administrator. If they do, the story of the funeral of the drunkard who was a worthless husband will be repeated. Fed up by the eulogy of the priest praising the dead man, the wife asked her son to lift the lid of the coffin so that she could verify whether it was her own husband or somebody else inside the coffin. The words of praise from the parson did not match with the deeds of her drunkard husband. She knew for certain, either the parson was lying, or the person lying in the coffin was different from the husband she had known for years.

To be a tough administrator is not much of a credit for a religious leader. How can I combine gentleness with the strictness of administration? I do not believe in slackness in discharging our duties. The clergy should work hard. They should be available to the flock entrusted to their care. They should function as a shepherds to the sheep, even at the expense of their own families.

Stubbornness does not help to win over people. I know that there is a strong criticism that there is general slackness in my administration. The critics say that when my predecessor Mar Thoma Dharma was alive, every

thing was strict. Every clergy used to shiver when he shouts at, or scolds, any for dereliction of duty. I believe them. I have seen the red face of Mar Thoma Dharmo becoming redder if he finds out that one student was late for Seminary class by five minutes or a priest was loitering around when the bishop visited the parish church.

Gossiping session of the clergy was never tolerated by him. "Work, Work" was his motto. He was not lazy and he did not allow his clergy to be lazy. He was a hard taskmaster, the clergy thought.

They got up a "memorandum" against him. He was sad to read it. He was also mad at it. He publicly condemned the signatories of the memorandum. The promotions of some clergy were delayed until they withdrew their support to this memorandum. Should I be strict? I gave some thought to it. I prayerfully considered this question of strictness. I knew it is not as bad as stubbornness. I believe that there is mercy and grace in the Christian gospel.

Jesus walked the *Via Dolorosa* to the Cross of Calvary. Every clergy and lay person entrusted to my care expect consideration and sympathy rather than the strict observance of law. The letter kills. The spirit gives life. Consideration does not mean nepotism or favouritism. The word nepotism means some special favour to a nephew or a relative. The nephew is appropriate in the case of bishops in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, because the bishops being celibates, have only nephews and not sons. In Protestant churches, however, most bishops have sons.

Fortunately, my nephews did not become priests. In fact, I dissuaded those who indicated a desire to serve the church. I had no relatives among the clergy. Otherwise some could accuse me of getting patronage or "push" from uncles, paternal or maternal. Even with my zeal for research into the history of this church, I could not succeed in tracing any clergyman among my ancestors. So I have no roots to boast of.

I ask the children in the nursery school what they want to be when they finish education. Some of them want to please me and reply "I want to be a bishop." But some surprise me with the answer, "I want to be a policeman." I query, "What for?" "I want to beat everybody" is their mischievous, but innocent, reply.

Some people want to beat others when they get power and authority. Some may have a score to settle with somebody. It is a sad thing that people exercise authority in the name of discipline.

I am not against discipline. It is true that I have not suspended or dismissed any clergyman during the 22½ years I was in office. My predecessor, a strict disciplinarian, suspended some within a decade of his assuming office as Metropolitan. I have no intention to justify my action or rather inaction by comparing it with that of my predecessor. The only excuse I can offer to my friends by way of explanation to my "inaction" is that no two people are alike. We think differently and act differently.

I have one disadvantage. My predecessor is not around to "criticise" me. After my consecration he lived for one year, not in India, but in Bagdad. Then he

passed away. I had occasion to meet some "predecessors" who criticised the actions of their successors. A senior bishop might have learned quite a lot from experience from which his successor in office could freely draw. The successor who comes to office with pre-conceived notions, trying to set right all the "wrongs" done by the predecessor, is up for deep disappointments and may be heading towards further divisions.

I plead guilty for the lack of strict discipline. I have always felt that the innocent should never be penalised by the rich and the powerful. Jesus was not powerful in the worldly sense. He was with the powerless. He was with the poor and the downtrodden. Yet he was strong, stronger than the High Priest, Herod and Pontius Pilate. He conquered death.

'Layman versus clergy' is a perennial problem I have encountered in my church administration. I cannot comment on this issue in a general way because the intensity of this malaise varies from church to church. In my church the clergy often cry out against the domination of the laity. The laity, on the other hand, express dissatisfaction at the performance of the clergy. In the Clergy Council where the laymen are not present, the clergy condemn the attitude of the laity. In the Representative Council where the laity has the majority, the laity condemn the slackness of the clergy. In both councils, the clergy and the laity do not forget to blame the Metropolitan, for all the lapses.

Having studied the intensity of the problem of the clergy versus laity, I am convinced that there isn't anything personal against me. If they have the mind to look

around and behind or even straight, it does not need even average wisdom to realise that both the laity and the clergy get a not-too-bad treatment in this church. I stand for bringing them together, as much as possible.

My friend Bishop Isho Mar Timotheus invited me once to speak at the clergy conference of the Mar Thoma Church, at Chungathara. I took a priest with me thinking that he would also learn something by attending such a conference. Towards the end of the conference Bishop Isho Mar Timotheus asked my priest to share his impressions of the conference.

He expressed his joy in attending such a clergy conference. Then he used that opportunity to tell the participants that in our church we never had any such good conference. He went on to add, "Our clergy do not get such chance to air our views openly. We have no freedom. You are fortunate that you could express your opinion freely." After the priest finished sharing his impressions, Bishop Isho Mar Timotheus got up and made an unscheduled speech. He said the priest from the Chaldean Syrian church should be happy that his bishop had given enough encouragement and freedom to his priest, to express openly his views. There was no intimidation on the part of his bishop. But in his church, he had not seen such boldness or freedom to be bold. He then went on to say in general terms that when we stand on this side of the water, the ground on the other side may look greener. Therefore one should not underestimate one's own church and the opportunities it affords. What one sees at a distance is a mirage, a desert with a semblance of water. The appearance is phony, not real or genuine.

In other words it is akin to what Gary Hart said after last US president's election, that a bird in the hand is better than a quayle in the bush !

3 Neglected Women

Women issues were brought to the forefront in recent years in both the secular and religious realms. After the proclamation of the decade for women by the U. N., the churches have declared in 1988 the Ecumenical Decade of churches in Solidarity with Women. The churches are evinced increasing awareness in giving women their rightful place in society.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi of India, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sree Lanka, Mrs. Golda Meir of Israel, Mrs. Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher of England, Mrs. Corazon Aquino of Philippines, Mrs. Khaleda of Bangladesh and scores of other women have given a lie to the myth that women are inferior to men.

Wives of some leaders have played prominent roles along with their husbands. Mrs. Coretta King, Mrs. Winnie Mandela, Mrs. Imelda Marcos, Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, Mrs. Raisa Gorbacheva and others will be remembered for their lesser or greater role. Queens and princesses too have traditionally played their roles admirably.

The women of the church are always active in almost all churches. But the degree of importance of their role varies from church to church. In India the Protestant churches have ordained women as full priests. In the Anglican communion in many parts of the globe women have started becoming bishops. I was present in the

Lambeth Conference in England on 1 August 1988 when such an august body including the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu voted in favour of permitting lady bishops if the provincial synods desired so.

About 15 women each in the Church of South India and the Church of North India have been ordained full clergy. Kerala, however, has only one lady priest in the C.S.I. in Trivandrum. The conservative Christians in Kerala will take long time to encourage and accept more women priests.

My church, will wait for the other eastern churches to act in this direction. But meanwhile I do not find any justification for not granting voting rights to the women or electing them to the posts of the Trustees just like any other laymen. The first amendment I am proposing to our church constitution framed in 1953, ever since I became the Metropolitan is to grant to laywomen all the rights enjoyed by laymen, with regard to elections, voting, etc., except ordination which may take sometime until the synods of various eastern churches start breaking the ice.

As our church has some litigations~for nearly three decades, it may not be proper for me to grant permission unilaterally to women of my group to vote, because more women are on our side! I do sincerely hope and wish that even if our two groups continue to remain separately for some more years, these two groups unanimously file a petition in the court to grant voting rights for women of both the rival groups. Once women become trustees and key office bearers in the church, they can initiate discussion demanding their legitimate place in the church along with their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons.

As some reporter is said to have stated after the Second Vatican Council in Rome that in the next Council, the Protestant Observer bishops, the Roman Catholic bishops too will come with their wives and in the following one their bishops will come with their husbands! What a pleasant change, chatter, charm and colour and what it would bring to church councils and Synods of bishops.

The Frustrated Youth

Sometimes I attend youth conferences of my church and other churches, as well as ecumenical youth conferences. In April 1991 I attended, on the opening day, the Youth Assembly of the National Council of Churches held in Cochin. As usual I found several young people frustrated. They are critical of their elders. They have ideas, sometimes new ideas. They do not care whether elders understand or appreciate them.

Fortunately we have some young leaders who can understand the youth. Despite the fact that I had commented 50 years of age I was invited to be with them. It was for a change I accepted this. The invitation did not assign me any responsibility to speak or to lead. It was just a request to be there to listen, to reflect and to learn. It is not always possible to be patient.

One of the senior friends came to the reception arranged by the Kerala Council of Churches and told me that he thought these young people had *Gerundophobia*, the fear of old people. The young keep away from the old. He thought that he had enough experience to share with the young. I responded saying that it was owing to

his *anecdotalage*, the young people keep away. They feared that the old people had a lot of anecdotes and reminiscences up their sleeves and the agitated youth of today would not have patience to listen to them. Being somewhere in the middle of a life span, at fifty plus, I could comment likewise objectively. What I would say after I complete sixty or seventy, I do not know. It hurts to be ignored. I guess that the feeling of hurt through old experiences is not less than that of the youth.

In a well presented keynote address entitled "The Challenge Before the Christian Youth Today", Dr. Anil Wilson, the young Principal of the prestigious St. Stephen's College, Delhi has this to say :

"It is necessary to acknowledge that Jesus of today who is not an *avatar* or apostle but the Son of God and as such He demands deeds not words. He desires eros and not logomachies and dialectics. He requires truth and sincerity and not shibboleths and shenanigans; He seeks imitative passion and not lukewarm assent; He values the leap into faith and not the 'let me first go and do my business and take care of loose ends and get some answers'. This is the major challenge before our youth today and it is no easy task to undertake."

Anil Wilson has his valuable suggestion for the solution of this pertinent problem. Although the standard of the language he uses is a little above the head of our ordinary people, we can forgive him because he is a Ph.D. in English literature. We should not expect him to lower the style of his writing to the level of an undergraduate. He writes:

“In order to accept this challenge we need to re-examine the idols we worship. The idols that we are called to dethrone today are the idols of materialism, impersonality, logos, distancing, literalism. These modern-day values are the outcome of an excessive market-culture conditioning of life which is based on acquisition, hoarding, consuming. All human relations are governed by this attitude of a profitable bargain and a favourable exchange.”

Democracy

My Church committees and Representative Councils sometimes provide occasions for outbursts of anger based on misconceived notions. I have a feeling—it is admitted to unbiassed members of the Church that I give chance to almost all the people to express their opinions. We used to sit in church council sessions for several hours. Once we sat from 3 p.m. to 9.50 p.m. in the Representative Council. When I attempt to control the proceedings by restricting the time for each speaker, they get angry and demand more time. Some, though not all, expect everyone to listen to whatever non-sense some one speaks.

My experience of attending meeting is varied. The ASA meeting in Delhi sometimes takes less than one hour. I often wonder whether it was justifiable for CASA to spend Rs. 5000 (now it is more than Rs.6000) for a flight to Delhi from Kerala just to speak for 5 minutes or less. But in a democratic set up such expenses are not counted as extravagant, but as inevitable.

On March 14, 1990 the Soviet parliament met. Watching the performance of Deputy Sobchak and

Academician Sakharov and some others who shouted down the speakers, Tatiana Ivanova wrote in the *New Times* under the column "Female logic", an article entitled "First think, then speak." It would be helpful for both men and women to know what a woman thought of this performance, watching the scene on television. (No. 13, 1990, p.12)

"As it has turned out, many think that Sobchak speaks too often. Now Deputy Leonid Sukhov rises to speak as many times as he thinks fit, even out of turn, and nobody seems to mind. Colonel Nikolai Petrushenko ascends the platform any time, and the audience takes this for granted. A close look at the statement by Deputy Ivan Polozkov will reveal that his criticism of the government was no criticism, but defamation. But no one shed tears, fell into ecstasy or spoiled for a fight over it.

My logic tells that people prone to collective excitement prefer street meetings to parliamentary proceedings. These people are perfectly indifferent to facts, thoughts and knowledge. They are men of impulse."

After airing her anger she concludes that article:

"What we need, however, is parliament, knowledge, the ability to understand facts, to understand clever speeches, to distinguish them from meaningless ones, to draw conclusions adequate to the situation in hand. As to meetings, we have had more than enough of them. Some are even more restrained than our congress has been.',

Slander

Slanders have become part of our society. Many of us delight in gossips. I cannot believe that it is the characteristic of a particular race or creed. Recently a Russian named Simon Soloveichik wrote an article under the caption "Salvation from Slander" in *New Times*, No. 35. August 27—September 3, 1990. He pleads for educating children between 12-14 what slander is. He makes an affront against "monstrous slander" that often begins from nowhere and gets published in *Pravda*. I guess the newspapers in other countries are no better. Soloveichik states: (P. 48)

Teach children that one cannot avoid being slandered but the slandered person can be rescued. And since it is not always possible to demonstrate the difference between the truth and slander, teach children in general not to believe bad things said about other people. One of the psalms (It's good that I read them) reads: "Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile." (Psalm 34, Verse 14). At one time Russians studied the Psalter in school.

But there have always been enough scoundrels to go around. The choir was right in singing: "Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul..." Very well said—straight out of the psalms. In one of his pedagogical writings, Leo Tolstoi wrote that he would come to believe in communism if it produced a book as great as the Bible.

Be confounded and consumed.....But they are not consumed and they are not confounded. Teach your children to despise slanderers !

Here, I found the psalm Psalm 70, verse 13 !
 "Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul... ! "

Perestroika

Perestroika is perhaps the only Russian word which the non-Russians know. And we heard it only recently. *Perestroika* is the only harbinger that heralds freedom and fresh changes not only in the U. S. S. R., but also in the East European countries.

In literature too, *Perestroika* made its distinctive mark. In the *New Times* (A Soviet weekly of World Affairs), founded in 1945, an article entitled "Literature's Sacrifice", in the issue No. 19 of 1990 dated May 8-14, Sergei Chuprinin remarks: (P. 46)

"The exceptions are delightful and encouraging, but if we were to snip out of the so-called "thick" journals, all the pages given over to our literary, philosophical and religious heritage, the backbiting essays and the seemingly endless polemics, their current inordinate circulations would drop and their readerships dwindle.

Nakedness, even what Pushkin would have termed miserable nakedness.

At the outset, this passed unnoticed, as we were all agog over the breakout at last of the

sedition classics of this 20th century, as we were all blinded by the long anticipated fireworks display of such great names as Gumilyov, Berdyayev, Pasternak, Platonov, Klyuyev, Nabokov, Florensky, Grossman, Shalamov, Dombrovsky, Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky. No wonder, as it took but two or three years for that Berlin wall between what was actually Soviet and non (anti)-Soviet literature to collapse. Over the four or five perestroika years we were nourished by that high-calory spiritual food that had accumulated over the decades."

Chuprinin contends that no revolution proceeds without sacrifices. The field of literature cannot be exempted from the overall sacrifices the country has to make. Looking at the "painful change" he avers: (P. 46)

"In the light of glasnost the language of the euphemism and Aesopean metaphor, so brilliantly devised to combat censorship, has now lost out. As for the language of the essay, it was soon realized that it did not offer much for aesthetic appreciation. Which all means that searches must be undertaken. That is a long, uphill task, especially pertaining to so fundamental a category as the arsenal in use."

The efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev to bring openness and change in the U. S. S. R. has brought wider acclaim. Reporting about the warm welcome which Mrs. Raisa Gorbacheva received in Milan, Tatiana Ivanova wrote in "Female Logic" in the *New Times*, No 1, January 1-8, 1990, p. 33.

"The world smiled back at us, because the world like the heavens above, cherishes all who have taken to the righteous path. We have repented the grievous crimes of Stalinism, have demonstrated a readiness not to conceal a single sin. We have withdrawn troops from the lands of others. We have asked forgiveness of peoples so cruelly done by, when the totalitarian dictatorship evicted them from their homes. Today the peoples of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the G. D. R. are deciding of their own accord how they are now going to live. Today nobody can call us any longer the "policeman of Europe." The wish to feel ourselves members of the human race and behave in accordance with this awareness is obvious to the whole world. That is why we are welcomed thus."

An interesting aside in this article is that the lady writer gave a pat on the shoulder of us men. It may be reproduced here with a hope that some of my women readers will be willing to mend their ways as the remark is not emanating from a man. (p. 33)

"One sidelight, which the male half of the human race never note. I will not say whom of the first ladies were meant, but often on the very next day after one was shown on television, we would gossip that the skirt was a bit too brief for her at her age, that for another the hairdo was too trendy, as after all, she was at an official reception, not on a dance floor, or that a third was a bit too flirtatious. Such is the stuff that we, women, are made of, and there is nothing you can do about it."

The above article argues with profound optimism that *perestroika* will bring pride to Gorbachev, not only as a dreamer but as one who is "so consistently and steadfastly translating this dream into reality." She concludes:(p.33)

"May all who prize perestroika be of good cheer today. We must not lose our enthusiasm for one moment. For otherwise society will feel dismayed and frightened and wish to revert to the "good old days," which many today really think were that."

At this stage I glanced through the book *Perestroika* written by Mikhail Gorbachev himself. In order to hear from the lion's mouth, I flipped through the first pages of this 310 page book presented to me by my friend Dr. Varghese Kurian during my visit to his home in Sydney in April 1989. May I conclude my treatment of *Perestroika* quoting the following three paragraphs from *Perestroika*, p. 11.

"I would say from the start that perestroika has proved more difficult than we at first imagined. We have had to reassess many things. Yet, with every step forward we are more and more convinced that we have taken the right track and are doing things properly.

Some people say that the ambitious goals set forth by the policy of perestroika in our country have prompted the peace proposals we have lately made in the international arena. This is an oversimplification. It is well known that the Soviet Union has long been working towards peace and co-operation and has advanced many proposals

which, had they been accepted, would have normalized the international situation.

True, we need normal international conditions for our internal progress. But we want a world free of war, without arms races, nuclear-weapons and violence; not only because this is an optimal condition for our internal development. It is an objective global requirement that stems from the realities of the present day."

Pope's Visit

The pope's visit to India in February 1986 created headlines in newspapers in India. Pope John Paul II visited Trichur too. He spoke to an audience of over half a million people gathered in a government ground close to the Metropolitan palace where I reside. I was happy to be on the stage along with a lot of ecclesiastical dignitaries. I had met the Pope in May 1985 at Vatican and had told His Holiness personally that we were looking forward to his visit to India.

The non-Catholic bishops had a special audience with the pope at Ernakulam, Cochin, at the Latin Archbishop's House the same afternoon. How to cover the 75 kms distance? The Pope flew in a helicopter. Bishop K. C. Seth and myself had decided to go by car. We had some doubts whether the cars would be delayed on the way. Therefore we decided later to go by train.

The train was crowded to the maximum capacity. The railway station master who knew us promised to pack

us in this overcrowded train. But how to get inside the train as people were hanging at the doors of the compartments? The stationmaster issued two second class tickets to us and put us in the store room of the dining car. That was the only space we could squeeze in. It was a small store room, a portion of the compartment which is used as the dining car. It was very warm inside. We were seated in the midst of vegetables. The kitchen chief was reluctant to let anybody into his kitchen store. The two bishops adorned in their best attire, ready to have private audience with the Pope, had no other place except amidst tomatoes, potatoes, onions and green chillies.

When the train stopped at the next station the people crowded in the platform peeped in and were amused to see two purple dressed prelates in the kitchen store. We tried to avoid the gaze of the people. But we did not put down the shutters of the kitchen store because it was already hot inside that small store room.

At Ernakulam Bishop Seth and I walked from the railway station to the Archbishop's House. No vehicles were allowed to pass through the road leading to the Archbishop's House as Pope's motorcade was expected within a few minutes. The people crowding on both sides of the road saw two bishops clad in their colourful regalia walking in a hurry to reach the Archbishop's House before the Pope arrived.

I had taken with me the travelogue I had written in Malayalam, about my pilgrimage to Israel and Rome in May 1985. I had printed therein the photo of my meeting the Pope. I tried to carry this book and the Polish translation of my song *Behold the Cross of Calvary*. The

assistant commandant of the Security Police explained to me that I was not allowed to carry anything in my hand—not only weapons or cameras, but also any literature. The Commandant has to examine it, and if found harmless, would be delivered to us after we were seated upstairs.

The Police officer, who is a Muslim, had known me while he was Deputy Superintendent in Trichur. He was willing to help me, but what about the Polish translation! Is it a poem of praise or abusive of a memorandum against the Catholic Bishops in Kerala? There were attempts by some Catholic laymen and “rebels” in Kerala to submit to the Pope a memorandum criticising the hierarchy in Kerala. Therefore greater precautions were taken to see that the Pope was not disturbed by these ‘rebels’.

After we were seated upstairs and before the Pope entered the room to meet us, my book and poem were handed back to me by the security officials so that I could present it to the Pope personally. When I presented the Pope with my travelogue, His Holiness said that he could not read Malayalam language. I defended my action by saying that I gave it to the Pope because the front cover photo was taken at Vatican the previous year. And the Pope could easily recognize his face without reading Malayalam.

To remedy the problem of the language, I gave the Pope the Polish translation of my song *Behold the Cross of Calvary*. His Holiness could easily read his mother tongue, although I found reading that language too much a strain on my tongue. The Pope appeared pleased as it seems that the translator of the song to Polish was a

person known to the Pope personally. I had made the acquaintance of this Polish priest at the Oriental Canon Law Conference in Germany in 1983.

No doubt, the Pope's visit was a memorable experience to many. It was the first time a Pope of Rome ever visited Kerala, the land claiming a heritage for Christianity as old as Rome. Pope Paul VI had been to Bombay in 1965. But the 1986 visit, which was the second visit of a Pope to India, and the first to Kerala was a big event. Some militant Hindus insisted that the platform erected temporarily for the Pope should be dismantled without much delay, as there were attempts by some Catholics to preserve it as a public monument or a place of religious importance.

I am glad that these platforms were removed before it ignited any confrontation. If a controversy had been sparked off, it would have been extremely difficult to find a satisfactory settlement, as both groups would consider it a prestige question and on the strength of the guarantees for the minority communities in the Indian Constitution it would have created a lot of headache even to the best constitutional experts, not to mention the ordinary people who would be asked to join the demonstrations which could turn violent, beyond the control of anybody.

CHAPTER 9

Personal

Friends

The circle of my friends is limited or restricted. Being a bishop, I would not like to go to a restaurant and talk with a friend over a cup of tea. My friends sometimes shy away from coming over to the Metropolitan's Palace where I reside. They are not sure whether they would be welcome here or not. Perhaps I may be busy. I may be out of station too.

The telephone could compensate to some extent this shortfall in frequent visits. But I have not made any over use of this facility. I do not telephone people without a special purpose. I use it very rarely. If I call my friends or they call me, I may go on talking for a long time, as there is no special charge for long talks on local calls. Of course, for trunk calls or S. T. D. calls, I will try to be less loquacious, because I know it costs either me or my friend too much. I read in the newspaper sometime ago that the duration of a local telephone call would be limited or charged extra.

School mates or College mates rarely come to see me. Some think that my religious vocation keeps a distance. Some of my old classmates are seen when

They come to invite me to bless the wedding of their children. That makes me think that I too am growing old. But at the same time I do not feel like old, having not gone through the normal stages of life of being a husband, a father and a father-in-law which my classmates have passed through.

I guess that I get time to write books, as I do not have to worry about how to pay dowry to a daughter or such other things as is the case with an ordinary man. A senior friend told me, "Bishop, can you please help me in finding a suitable husband to my daughter. I know that you know a lot of people." It is true. At the same time I do not want to be called a marriage broker in our society where most of the marriages are arranged by parents.

Ralph Richard Keithahn, an American missionary who tried to live like a Gandhian, has expressed in his autobiographical work *Pilgrimage in India* (Published by L. S., Madras, 1973) the difficulties he had encountered with his travelling companions as he followed the principle of temperance strictly. When Keithahn came to India on an English Binny Line one-class boat from Marseilles he had his first encounter. He recalls: (p. 13).

"Those at my own table 'pulled my leg' a good deal because I would not drink alcoholic drinks. I would also not join them in their 'harmless gambling' in their 'Horse Races.' They again had their fun when on the last day they joined in a large charity raffle and said that if they won they would give the money to my mission work! Of course, I told them that I would refuse to

accept it. They insisted that I must. Fortunately, I did not have to face that trial although all this took place with a good sense of humour."

R. R. Keithahn whose autobiographical work has been quoted already speaks of the 'Yes-men' in the mission field in pre-Independent India. After the missionary era the problem has grown in intensity. The 'Brown Sahebs' or the Indian bosses have outwitted their missionary predecessors in some areas in granting favours to the 'Yes-men'. Keithahn wrote as follows: (P. 26).

"One of the great evils of the Mission institution was that of producing 'Yes-men' out of our co-workers. Naturally, people wanted the approval of missionaries who had access to a good deal of money and power. They would like to have our goodwill so that we would promote them and give their relatives and children the facilities that they desired."

Guidance of the Holy Spirit

One day a lady appeared near the door of the Metropolitan's Palace where I live. Upon my query about the intention of her unexpected, unwanted and unwelcome visit, she asked me whether I had any revelation from the Holy Spirit regarding her. I casually commented that if the revelation is regarding her it should be given to her and not to me. Despite the traditional hesitation of the Indian woman to discuss about love and marriage publicly she made it known to me that the Holy Spirit revealed to her that I would marry her.

I was mature enough not to be excited or shocked by the revelation she claimed she had from the Holy Spirit. In a very cool manner I told her that I did not have any such revelation either from human or from divine source. She persisted that she was so cocksure her revelation was right from God. Feeling helpless to convince her that her information was not from God, I took enough courage to crack a joke, "Sister, it is too late now. You could have revealed this revelation some years ago before I became a bishop." In our church the deacons are celibates. She is a Pentecostalist. My jokes would not change her mind.

About the guidance of the Holy Spirit. R. R. Keithahn recorded the following comment. (P. 47).

"Once, at a particularly serious moment of decision in the Mission, one of them affirmed that he was certain that he had the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the matter. A more youthful elder, with a sense of humour which always seemed to express itself when things got a bit tense, affirmed, 'It is very interesting; the Holy Spirit has also been guiding me; but he has said just the opposite to me!' There was a roar of laughter! The tension was resolved; we got back to serious and thought-filled business again!"

In my case I could not easily get out of the harassment. She was not prepared to turn back as she believed that her guidance was from God Himself. One of the senior priests came to see me at that time. I explained my predicament. Since he knew that this lady was a "nut", he told her to get out and get lost without

worrying about the so-called guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Single Parents

I have interesting news from the *Alumni/ae News* of Winter 1991 of the Princeton Theological Seminary where I had my first year of my Doctorate (Th. D.) programme. Now Th. D. is changed to Ph. D. at Princeton and several other seminaries in the United States of America.

Some of the single graduates of Princeton have begun to experience loneliness. Parenting as an escape from loneliness is not yet begun in India. The comments of some of these "singles" are thought-provoking. Maureen Morris who graduated from Princeton in 1983 states (P. 9)

"On the other hand, parenting answers the personal needs of some adults as well. Says Morris, 'I'm not all altruistic; I get a lot of personal satisfaction out of doing this.

...When it looks like you're not going to get married, (a child is) something with whom you share your life. You're connected to something."

There was resistance from various quarters. Still some graduates overcame it. The article speaks about Deena Candler (1981) who adopted a child from Honduras (p. 10)

"Candler found that when she brought her son to church and members had a chance to meet him,

"people really rallied.....I had prayed for a child who would be adoptable and sociable, more for his sake than anything else. Well, the Lord sent me right child. Kelsey just won everybody over." At a baby shower given by church members, Candler found the best gift to be a book in which people had signed up to babysit while she attended meetings and other functions."

The parents testify that their adopted children have helped them. We read: (p. 10)

"As a non-parish clergywoman who worships at the Trinity Presbyterian Church in East Brunswick, Johnson believes that "Gracie helped me to get to know people better. Before I used to be "just the preacher who came to our church," and now I'm Gracie's mom. That made me more of a real person in some ways. Although they welcomed me before, it made me more human, I think." As a college chaplain, Candler has found that her son joins games on campus "and plays with people I would never meet otherwise."

David Wall (1980), assistant director of the School of Christian Education at Princeton, started as a foster father. Then he obtained approval both as a foster and adoptive parent through the State of New Jersey. Wall was successful in his efforts to adopt a baby. He brought his daughter home from the hospital when the baby was only five days old. About an advantage of this new life with a daughter, Wall has something to share with us. (P. 10).

“When I used to walk down the street alone or with another adult, no one would say hello,” relates Wall, “but when you have a baby with you almost everyone stops, so I get to meet all kinds of people. The same goes with the church. A lot of people have come up to me because of her.”

It is a new phenomenon. We have to wait and see how successful and popular it is going to be among the single parents.

Gardening

At the Metropolitan's Palace in Trichur where I live since I became a Metropolitan in 1968, I have a garden with dozens of coconut trees and mango trees. I planted pepper vines, nutmeg trees and clove trees. We have plenty of papaya plants. Cocoa-plants too were planted. My idea is to plant at least one tree of each variety of fruit trees. We have a huge tree yielding big jack fruits. We have cashew trees producing enough cashew fruits with nuts outside. (Perhaps cashew is the only fruit where the nut is outside the fruit, instead of being inside)

Trees with *Sapota*, egg fruits, velvet apples etc are also there. I planted a vine plant. I was delighted when I got some grapes. But later as I did not find time to prune the vine after a crop, the plant ceased to bear fruit. I tried tomatoes, drumsticks and such vegetables which are useful for my kitchen. We plant green leafy vegetables as well. We have a neem tree and some plants with medicinal value too. The leaves of some plants serve to reduce my blood sugar level.

I tried to plant flowers. But my preference is for vegetables than flowers because I can save some money I plant vegetables or fruit trees. From flowers I get pleasure for my eyes, but no satisfaction for my stomach. I read a letter from the publisher of SPAN. In the final para of April 1991 issue the publisher observes as follows:

“Earth laughs in flowers,” Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote. “Earth also, I’d like to believe, takes pleasure in the efforts that each of us takes to make our surroundings more pleasing and attractive.”

Yes, flowers are good. I remember, when I was a student in America, the hippies came to me with flowers requesting me to bedeck my beard with those smiling flowers. I think that the hippies were called flower children in those days.

I want to be a part of the education process for ecology. Mrs. Maneka Gandhi, daughter-in-law of the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, advocates green philosophy. She believes that trees also have feelings like human beings. Trees cry when they are cut. She is against felling the trees and being cruel to animals. Her present tenure as the Minister for Environment has given a fillip to the greening efforts.

Although some of these green people may appear to be extremes, they have a reason to be extremes and aggressive in their mission to preserve the patches of green surviving in our surroundings. Many of us are unfortunately too unmindful of the needs of nature and our own responsibility not to denude the forests and the greeneries around us.

The following observation in the latest issue of SPAN caught my attention as we all live in a world of stress these days. One may wonder what the bushes and flowers have to do with stress in our lives. Then read the following remark. (SPAN, April 1991, p. 24).

“Roger Ulrich of the University of Delaware in Newark has conducted studies of stress reduction. By measuring students’ alpha waves—brain waves indicating deep relaxation—he has found them to be more serene near vegetation. In a study of apartment dwellers, Rachel Kaplan of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor has also found that those who have access to gardens and parks have a more positive outlook about themselves, their neighbors, and their work. “Nature matters to people,” she contends. “Trees, glistening water, chirping birds, and budding bushes and flowers—these are important ingredients for a full life. To have these available only rarely..... deprives people of tranquillity and spiritual sustenance.” That’s why, in Lewis’s view, so many new office buildings, apartment complexes, and hospitals are designed around plantfilled atria.”

Gardening and planting trees give happiness to our minds, exercise to our bodies, satisfaction in our lives. I try to propagate this message and practise it in my life in a humble way. It is a must in our society, to return to nature and preserve the ecology of our planet earth.

Taking Rest

About taking rest I read a humorous remark in the delightful book *I dared to Call Him Father* written by

Bilquis Sheikh, widow of Mr. Sheikh who was the Minister of Interior in Pakistan under the late Z. A. Bhutto. Bilquis Sheikh got baptised a Christian. At the thick opposition from friends and foes, she began to worry what she would do with her daughter Doctor Tooni's five year old son Mahmud who was under the custody and care of Bilquis.

The grandmother read the Bible to Mahmud. The boy began to listen. Bilquis recalls: (P. 96)

"Once, after I had read to him, 'Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest,' I heard his nap-time pleas: 'Jesus, I love You and I will come unto You, but.....please don't give me rest. I don't like resting.'" He would even fold his hands and pray, but I knew that it was hard on him being alone and seeing me alone."

Mr. Devi Lal, the unpredictable Deputy Prime Minister of India, uttered the following statement which perhaps is true of some politicians: "There is no rest for me. Rest for a politician is when he is under arrest." To me and to many bishops often there is no rest. Rest is given to us only when we are sick. Tonsillitis troubles me of and on. Although the ENT surgeon advised the removal of the tonsils by surgery, I did not comply with his advice. Tonsillitis trouble provides the only rest I get, once in six months.

It is no ordinary tonsillitis, it is pharyngitis, which is deeper down in the throat. The best cure is to give rest to the throat. That is difficult for a man like me. I talk

longer and louder when I am supposed to give rest to my throat. I do not know when I would heed to the advice that God has given us two ears, but only one mouth. We are supposed to talk less and hear more. Moreover half the duty of the mouth is to eat food. Therefore a man is free to talk only one fourth of the time he hears.

One of my "obedient priests" stated that I open my mouth only for two things, "one is to eat food and the other to utter a lie." I did not challenge this "obedient priest" to prove the veracity of his observation. I recalled to my mind what I once read; "Who needs enemies when one has such friends?" Who needs disobedient priests when one has "obedient priests" like that. My readers know that there is at least a third purpose of opening my mouth, that is to joke. I do not exercise this right often, especially with the priests under my administration, because they will get a chance to misunderstand, misinterpret or misuse some innocent jokes.

The novelists in Malayalam often announce that the characters in this or that novel have no real person, living or dead, behind it. The writer knows well his characters are not appearing from thin air or conceived in his fertile imagination. They depict somebody they know in real life. They resemble more the living than the dead. The writers escape from libel suits by repeating the lie that their characters are imaginary and are not any they know of.

Sycophancy

It is possible when one assumes a high office, whether secular or ecclesiastical, he will be surrounded

y a vicious circles of sycophants who always praise his master's ability in administration, holy life and humility. I have heard about a king who could not sleep without hearing the flattery of such timeservers. One night the court jester listed the sterling qualities of their great king. Despite the long list of underserving epithets, the king appeared unhappy. The court jester was quick to detect the dissatisfaction of his master. To his begging look, the king replied, "Tonight you have forgotten to mention one of my great qualities".

"What is that, master?" queried the confused
court jester.

"Our great humility" replied the king quite
unabashed.

In my case, I have learned that we cannot judge that precisely the utterances they make or the appearances they put on. They come to kiss the episcopal ring on my right hand. Did not Judas Iscariot kiss his master when he betrayed Jesus? When one says, "Your Grace, the Most Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan," I am not always inclined to believe that he has more respect and love towards me than the one who simply calls me Mar Aprem.

One day I telephoned to the Printing Press where this book is being printed. I wanted to talk to the lady who sets the types in the Press. Protocol may not permit me to talk to her direct over the phone. It may be an embarrassment when we telephone a lady, and that too an employee of the Press. But to me, I preferred to talk to the person concerned to make my instruction easily understood. If I entrust this to my secretary to talk to

the Manager of the Press, to pass on the message to the lower level to the person concerned, the message becomes vague and incomplete.

The peon in the Press answered my call. I told him, "Mar Aprem, speaking. Kindly call the compositor." He instantly obliged. I could hear his shouting, "Aprem is calling." The "Mar" is gone. Despite his referring to me as simply "Aprem" he did not sound any discourteous to me than some one who used to say, "His Grace, the Most Revd. Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan."

I have been noting in recent months the address of the *Catholic India* publication which I receive from the office of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India in Delhi. My Address as it appears there is Most Rev. Sr. Mar Aprem. They think that I am a sister or a Mother Superior. That must be the reason why they changed Most Rev. Dr. to the Most Rev. Sr. Although I have thought of writing to the CBCI office in Delhi requesting a correction on Sr., I refrained from doing it, as long as it gave an instance for writing a new joke to laugh at myself.

In *Bishop's Jokes* I had mentioned about the Christian Literature Society in Madras which sent me a book changing my address His Grace Mar Aprem into Miss Grace Mar Aprem, because Grace or Gracy is the name of a lady and what a word "His" has to do in front of a woman's name. Miss is appropriate !

Some time ago I got a letter addressed Dr. Ma Prem. The man in America thought my name is Ma Prem instead of Mar Aprem. Aprem is negation of love. *Prem* in many

Indian languages is love. Moreover, the name of the notorious lady Secretary of Acharya Rajneesh is Ma Prem. Ma stands for *Mataji* or Mother. Some of the lady devotees of Rajneesh were called Ma Prem or Ma Sheela etc.

As a matter of fact I have nothing in common with Acharya Rajneesh except that he was teaching in the city of Jabalpur while I was a theological student there during 1957-61. I may have seen him there, I do not remember. After I had left Jabalpur, Acharya Rajneesh was Chief guest at a function in the Leonard Theological College, my *almamater*, I saw his photo in the college magazine. But such a reception for Rajaneesh was before he became a famous and then notorious in many ways after he had assumed the title Bhagawan and later Osho. I suppose nobody mistook me for Acharya Rajneesh, because he was nine years older than I and his beard was longer than mine. But to give me the name of his secretary i. e., Ma Prem was an occasion for a big laugh for me.

Some people ask me what my first name and surname are. Mar is the first name and Aprem is the surname. I know it is not true but computers put it that way. Actually *Mar* means "My Lord" and is a title used for all saints and bishops.

Today, in many countries political leaders have many supporters and admirers. Many of them have their eyes set on getting party tickets to contest elections and climb the ladder of power. The religious leaders have less of flatterers, I guess. Still, I often hear of an inner circle around the bishops or the leaders of churches. Some want just power or position. Others look for some favours

or a job in a church institution. With very few institutions under me and less favours to receive from me, I do not find many coming closer to me.

In her autobiography entitled *All These Years: A Memoir* (Seminar Publications. Rs.250) published in April 1991 Mrs. Raj Thapar writes about Mrs. Indira Gandhi, that some members of Indira's Kitchen Cabinet such as Dinesh Singh, and Inder K. Gujral who later became Foreign Ministers, used to feed her with informations and insinuations about others. Raj Thapar writes: (*Indian Express Magazine*, April 21, 1991, p. 1)

“Dinesh and Inder were her bidding boys. They brought her news, gossip which she was addicted to, of little intrigues, real or imaginary, may be even projected rumours on her behalf, I really don't know.”

I pray to God to save me from sycophants and flatterers. When long introductions are made, sometimes it becomes obvious. I pray to God that I may not be carried away by the sugar coated words they use. In the welcome speech if one says that they were unanimous in their committee that I should be the only speaker and they were enquiring here and there how to get me as a speaker, it is clear that several speakers had turned down their requests and they approached me at the last minute as a substitute.

Recommendation

I have not compared notes with others as to how they manage to avoid those asking for recommendations for a

job or admissions to a College or school. In Private colleges in Kerala normally 80% of the seats are filled on the basis of merit. Even then some people request for a recommendation letter for admissions. It is an additional merit, some think, especially when they know that they will not be admitted on real merit. In the case of minority communities 20% of the seats are set apart as community quota.

Twenty percent of the total seats are for the management of the Private Colleges as their privilege for owning that College. Some Colleges take donation from the students towards building construction etc. But many institutions who already own all the facilities do not accept any donation for admission or appointment.

Some are experts in arranging letters of recommendation not only for admissions to schools or colleges, but also to get a job in a Bank or a private firm. It is a nuisance and waste of time in some cases. It is also true that often unworthy people approach me for a recommendation letter or a character certificate. I ask them how I can request an employer, to reject the well-qualified person they are prone to select in order to accommodate a person who has my letter. In some cases the candidate is not directly known to me. He is the cousin of the friend of the uncle of a member of my church.

I often wish that the "recommendation" business should be condemned and eradicated. But a member of my church tells me, "Bishop, I am asking you for a recommendation letter not to get an undeserved post, I am asking you to stop an unworthy person from taking my job by the recommendation letter of somebody else,

I think all concerned in this vicious circle should agree that merit and not recommendation should triumph ultimately.

Friends Abroad

There are many friends abroad who encourage my work and writing. Some are known through ecumenical contacts. It is not easy to be in touch with all of them always. Sometimes at Christmas I try to respond to the greetings of some. On an average I write 365 letters an year, a letter a day. Sometimes there is a whole week without writing any letter. I might have been travelling or reading proof sheets of the books or writing a book. I have wished that there were 36 hours every day so that I could write letters to my friends.

Dr. Johannes Madey is a German Orientalist. He visited me in Trichur and I visited him in Germany. He informs me about his writing projects and I send him my magazines. Although *Voice of the East* is a small magazines, with a small circulation, here is what Dr. Madey writes;

"I wish to express at the same time, my gratitude for receiving regularly "Voice of the East" which is for me a precious mine of information regarding the Church of the East. I am to write again a chronicle of the Syriac Churches in India for the Dutch periodical "*Het Christelijk Oosten*." So I can profit from your small magazine, a lot."

In the past year three of my friends abroad passed away.

Fr. E. R. Hambye S. J.

Fr. E. R. Hambye, a Jesuit priest from Belgium who taught in the Catholic seminaries in India, died of heart attack, in Namur, Belgium on 7 August 1990 after completing 74 years of age. He was a scholar in Syriac language and an expert on the Eastern Churches. He served the cause of the Syrian Churches as Consultant of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India's Commission for Ecumenism and as a Consultant of the Roman Congregation for Oriental Churches.

As a great Church historian he wrote several articles in international journals. He translated Cardinal Tisserant's *History of Christianity in India*. He was revising his book on the history of Christianity in India, Vol. III, covering the 18th century, when he was taken away from us.

He was a professor at the Oriental Institute, Rome, in recent years. I was his guest at a lunch in Rome in 1985. He had been my guest several times in Trichur. He was a friend of our Church. His death is a great loss to many. He was a close friend of mine in the Church History Association of India, Syriac Symposium, and Ecumenical Conferences in India and abroad.

Archdeacon Kaku Lazar

News had reached about the death of Archdeacon Kaku Lazar in America some months ago. He was my Malpan, teacher of Syriac language in Trichur in the 1956-57 period. Our Malpan was only a deacon then, yet a great scholar. He had left his family of seven children in Iraq, in order to teach us Syriac in Trichur.

Malpan was not fluent in English. We did not know Syriac. But he taught us. He recited Hudra prayers by heart. He taught us language and the tunes of anthems and prayers.

In 1962 I stayed in his house at Mar Zaya Cathedral, Bagdad where he was priest. He was happy to see that his student had passed B. D. degree. Six years later when I saw him, it was not a pleasant sight. He had been pushed out of the parsonage where he was staying in 1962. He and his family had been in a house nearby. After my consecration as Episcopa on 21 Sept. 1968, I looked at the house where he was, with pain at the division of this ancient Church which separated the teacher and his disciples into two opposite factions.

Later Qasha Kaku Lazar served as a priest in England, U. S. A. and Canada. He was an Archdeacon in Chicago in his later years. He was one of the great scholars of our Church in recent years.

Mr. Aprem J. de Kelaita

Mr. Aprem J. de Kelaita, son of late Qasha Joseph Kelaita, passed away in England on 18 Sept. 1990. He was the eldest son of the renowned scholar Qasha Joseph Kellaitha who was the founder of the Assyrian School and Assyrian Press in Mosul.

Mr. Aprem did not become a priest like his father. He became British Vice Consul in Mosul. From Iraq he moved to England. He kept up his interest in the propagation of this ancient language.

Aprēm married Hanna, the younger sister of Mar Yosip Khananishu Metropolitan (d. July 1977). Her elder sister was the mother of the late Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun (d. 6 Nov. 1975). With connections with high places in our Church and in his own right, Rabbi Aprēm was highly respected by all his friends.

His house, 12 St. Stephen's Road, Ealing, London was the "embassy" of the Church of the East in England. During my studies in England, while I was a deacon, I spent my Christmas vacation in 1961 in his house. He was like a father to me. He had no children. His home was an open house to many Assyrians.

In July 1988 when I visited him in his home in Ealing, he was sick and old. When I said good bye I had a premonition that it was going to be our last meeting. With a friendship of nearly thirty years, I pray, "May his soul rest in peace."

CHAPTER 10

Awards

The first "award" I received was an international one, the *Men of Achievement* instituted by the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England. I was surprised to receive information regarding this award, as I had no direct contact with this organization in Cambridge. I had spent a few days in Cambridge during my studies in King's College, London in 1961-62. I have also watched the famous annual event of a boat race between Cambridge and Oxford in which even the members of the royal family used to cheer and encourage their sides.

I had heard about the *Men of Achievement* of the International Biographical Centre in Cambridge when they first instituted this award in 1974, as Mr. P. Thomas, my neighbour, a writer in English language, was included in that year's award along with the famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin and a few others. It was after a decade another person from Trichur was chosen. It was a pleasant surprise that the choice fell on me. The Archbishop of York, a Cardinal in Rome, Vice Chancellor Dr. V. K. R. V. Rao in India, Mr. Rajeswara Rao, the general Secretary of the Communist Party of India, P. Shiv Shankar, Cabinet Minister in the Congress Governments of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were among the recipients. What a strange company I was in! The Award plaque reached

me in January 1985. I tried to hide it without making a big thing of this award. Gradually the news began to leak out and Church and civic leaders in Trichur went ahead for the public celebration of this event.

On February 17, 1985, a committee of hosts consisting of the prominent people of Trichur accorded me a Public Reception in my *almamater*, St. Thomas College, where I had studied for my Intermediate course in 1955-57. At present there is no Intermediate Course in our university. The two-year course prior to B. A. degree is now called Pre-Degree course.

The then Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. K. Karunakaren, made necessary adjustments in his busy schedule to inaugurate this function in Trichur. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Cochin, Dr. K. Gopalan, an eminent Engineer and scientist, spoke at the function and presented me with a felicitatory address printed on red silk. The Vice Chancellor had difficulty in reading it in Malayalam language. The members of Parliament, and the Legislative Council and almost all the dignitaries of the locality spoke on the occasion.

At the behest of the Reception Committee, I had to put on my shoes instead of usual chappels which I wore in India. I was to be fully dressed up with a headgear and black gown. The Reception Committee also asked me not to crack jokes and not to burst into singing at the function. They had arranged Miss Uma Maheswari, a well known vocalist, to sing my favourite song *Behold the Cross of Calvary* in Malayalam language. When the Reception Committee began to dictate how I should walk and look during the function, I almost felt like telling them that I

was awarded "Men of Achievement", for being my own, and not for acting under instruction, and to leave me alone to behave in my natural way rather than showing up.

The Kerala congregation of Mar Thoma, Orthodox Syrian and the C.S.I., churches in Madras arranged a similar public reception to me. I had built a church for our community in Madras. It was the dream of my predecessor. The priest of our church there, Fr K. J. Jos, was therefore happy to work with the reception committee in Madras.

The felicitation address signed by Mrs. O. P. Sosama, District Collector of Madras, Mr. K. R. Rambhad, Director of P & T, Madras Circle and Mr. V. P. Chintan M. L. A. of Villuvakam constituency in Madras, had words of praise. Printed in blue silk the Address refers to my achievements:

"Your elevation to the episcopate was a recognition of your many faceted talents as administrator, Scholar, Shepherd and father in God. Within a brief span of time as Bishop of the Church of Christ you have made a name covetable and envious among the Bishops of India. Though a numerically small church in India, the Chaldean Syrian Church in India is now widely known because of your grace's involvement in the social and religious life of the country. Your Grace represents the synthesis of the insights of the West with the wealth of the tradition of the East. Your Grace is the blend of the evangelical zeal, conservatism, amazingly harmonising modernism and Orthodoxy. Without prejudice to the riches of the tradition of the Eastern Church, Your Grace has

made the Church capable of facing the modern challenges of the day.

Your Grace is humane, capable of mixing with the ordinary people and this capacity is well represented in your book "Bishop's Jokes."

Your Grace is magnanimous in dealings, generous in encouraging, stern in discipline, truly proving a great man of God. Humble in appearance, noble in deeds, lofty in thinking, 'your Grace has endeared yourself to us as well as to your Grace's flock.

We the public of Madras city pay this respectful tribute to your Grace's multi faceted personality."

Most Rev. Zacharias Mar Dionysius, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Syrian Church, and Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church were on the stage when the reception was accorded to me. As it is an honour and recognition to my small community in Madras I thanked God for the same.

It goes without saying that nobody should be carried away by the generous words used in felicitation addresses. It is not easy to attain plenitude of piety and efficiency in administration. I always pray God to save me from megalomania. Therefore I always take such words of appreciation with a pinch of salt—and in some cases a little more than the usual pinch.

On the day I completed 50 years of age, in Vienna, a friend walked in with medals. It was Dr. Helmut Braundle Falkensee, general Secretary of Albert Schweitzer society

who pinned the Medal on me. The golden Cross of St. Johannis Bruderschaft was presented to me. The other honours conferred on me on that day were

1. The Grand Capitular of the Order of St. Andrew.
2. Honorary Diploma of Academia Tambauense di Filosofia, Ciencias e Letras, Brasil.

I was overwhelmed with all these medals and certificates to the extent that I forgot to thank him fittingly. He had read my books and heard about me from friends and therefore without any move from outside he conferred all these titles and honours.

A Hat trick

When I came back from Vienna the Rotary Club of Trichur telephoned to me to enquire whether I would accept the Rotary Literary Award of 1990. I was happy to accept it. The Rotary Club is an international organization. Trichur town is my hometown. A recognition of the people of my town is an encouragement. This award consisted of Rs. 1000 and a citation.

The second award was announced in Kottayam in connection with the International Book exhibition. I was selected as the *Author of the Year* for the National Christian Book Awards for English language. Mr. Giora Becher, Consul of Israel in India based in Bombay, had agreed to go over to Kottayam to present the National Christian Book Awards on February 3, 1991. It was postponed as he could not go to Kottayam as planned.

The third recognition came at somewhat the same time. The Indian Society for Promoting Christian

Knowledge (I.S. P.C.K.) Delhi announced Christian Writing Competition. I won the first prize of Rs. 1500. My paper *Adoption Abroad* was published by them as No. 9 of Development Education series.

All these three awards encourage me to write more and produce better books.

CHAPTER 11

California to Canada

As the printing of this autobiography was about to be over an opportunity came my way to have a quick trip to California. As I had to take the trouble of making such a long trip, I decided to stretch it a bit to include three Sundays. I could then conduct Holy Communion service in the two Churches I had already done service namely Hughson, California and Chicago. The third Sunday was to do service for the congregation in Canada.

I had gone to the U. S. A. only via Europe in all my previous trips. (1966, 1977, 1980, 1984 and 1988) I decided to fly via the eastern route as my destination was California. It is shorter to Los Angeles via Singapore or Hongkong. If I flew via Rome I could get the clergy concession in Alitalia known as Raptim subsidy. But I was told that the concession in Alitalia has been reduced from 15% to 6% in flights to the U. S. A. Therefore out of Rs. 30,000, only Rs. 1,800 will be Raptim subsidy, leaving Rs. 28,200 for me to pay. The full ticket via Singapore or Hongkong could cost only Rs. 27,300. Thus I flew via Singapore and Hongkong to Los Angeles without availing the generosity of the Raptim subsidy from Holland.

The Canadian embassy in Delhi demanded that I should present myself in their office even for a tourist

visa. I had, therefore, to start off on my foreign tour without a Canadian visa. Fortunately the U. S. Consulate in Madras issued a visa for multiple entry to the U. S. A. for 5 years, i. e. upto April 1996. It is the first time they showed such a gesture to me although they had done so to some other Indian visitors who had been to the U. S. A.

I had expressed my ire against the Americans in my travelogue *From Bagdad to Chicago*, as the American Embassy in Amsterdam had refused visa to visit Chicago in 1984. Finally I managed to get one in London. In 1987 at Madras I applied for an American visa and they granted it for one year. I could use it just before its expiry when I visited USA in August 1988. In 1991 even without asking for a visa for 5 years, the US Consulate in Madras gave it for 5 years. It is not due to any ability on my part to manipulate, but just because they wanted to escape the trouble of handling another application from me next year or so, I presume.

I still cannot forget the deep disappointment I had in 1984 when I was advised by the officer in the American Embassy in Amsterdam to go to Madras and obtain the visa from there, where I was known. He was of the firm opinion that I was going to the USA to obtain employment. I told him that Madras was not next door. - Moreover, my ticket to Chicago was okay for the next day. I tried to tell him that I had a Master's degree from New York and never attempted to find a job there or obtain a Green Card. I never overstayed either in my 1977 or 1980 trips. Being a bishop I prefer the poverty of India to the affluence of America.

Before I started arguing further and pleading for his mercy, the tall security man approached me and asked,

“Are you not leaving?” The ignorance of the ,adaman officer and arrogance of the security man persuaded me not to use my gift of the gab but to use my pen against this kind of harassment to law-abiding citizens. Some of these people in their intoxication with power look down on innocent visitors like us as criminals. I have a five year visa now. I feel that some justice has been done to me and that I should stop complaining.

On 8th May I took a train from Trichur to Cochin and thence a flight to Madras. After attending to some official matters for the parish, I flew at mid night from Madras to Singapore. Smoking is banned in all domestic flights in India, but such ban was not applicable to International flights. Hence when I flew from Madras I requested for a non-smoking seat. In the smoking section I noticed a new sign “Cigar and pipe not permitted”. I have always thought cigarettes are more injurious to health than pipe smoking. Anyhow, I am glad more people are giving up smoking. Public transports are now healthier and more free from smoke than it used to be.

I noticed the information regarding certain privileges in the Marco Polo Club for the travellers in the Cathay Pacific Airlines who travel 40,000 kms in six months. The membership in the Marco Polo Club would entitle them to certain privileges. I am not a constant traveller. Yet I was curious to know the rules and regulations of the Marco Polo Club.

Actually I covered 40,000 Kms in this trip of 3 weeks. But within USA, it was the American Airlines which took me from Los Angeles to Toronto via Chicago and back. The flight in the American Airlines did not

count for the total mileage privilege of the Cathay Pacific. I would not make myself eligible for the Marco Polo Club membership unless I took another trip within the next five months.

Singapore to Hong Kong is 2,754 kms and Hong Kong to Los Angeles is 12,207 making a total of 14,961 kms (the flight time for the two flights is 3.15 hours and 12.35 hours, thus making a total of 15.50 hours).

From Singapore to Los Angeles and back I travelled nearly 30,000 kms in three weeks. If I travel 40,000 kms in six months I am entitled to Marco Polo Club membership which entitles me to VIP treatment.

From Madras I flew to Singapore not by Cathay Pacific but by Singapore Airlines. That distance is not counted for mileage calculation for Marco Polo membership. Cathay Pacific does not touch Madras at all. I could go to Bombay and fly to Hong Kong. But from Bombay it does not go direct to Hong Kong. It goes to Bangkok and then to Hong Kong which means a distance of $(3097 + 1848) = 4945$ kms. Bombay to Los Angeles is only $(12,207 + 4945) = 17,152$.

Cathay Pacific is based in Hong Kong and it has direct flights to places such as Brisbane, Frankfurt, London, Los Angeles, Sydney, Perth, Paris, Osaka etc.

On Thursday 9th May, early morning I flew from Singapore via Hong Kong to Los Angeles. I reached Los Angeles by noon on the same day. My watch showed half an hour past midnight. It was only 12 noon in

Los Angeles. The California time is $12\frac{1}{2}$ hours behind us. At that time Chicago time would be 2 and New York time 3 in the afternoon.

I always watch time when I reach a city. It is not fair to telephone to people if they are sound asleep. I was not happy, once, when somebody from California telephoned me a couple of hours after I had gone to sleep. I am sure that he had not known that it was an odd time to call someone in India.

My suit case reached in an half open condition. I had no key to lock it with. Therefore they removed it from the belt and kept it separate. I was still in the long queue for immigration control. I did not see my suitcase. I complained to a staff member who directed me to the Cathay Pacific counter. I went there to complain about the lost luggage. To my pleasant surprise my suit case was there. The staff member felt relieved when they saw the owner of the suit case.

Jose Mookken, my brother was waiting for me. He drove me to his house in San Diego. It was a pleasant reunion with my brother's family. In 1977 and 1988 I had visited him in San Diego. During my 1984 visit he was in India.

Antony Katzdorn is a new addition to this family. He is the husband of my brother's elder daughter Miriam known as Mia. He works in the navy in the submarines section. Since Saddam Hussain did not own submarines the Desert Storm operations did not call him for duty in Saudi Arabia. But now he is getting ready to go to Japan for an year's training.

Many friends whom I had met in 1988 came for supper to my brother's home, in two batches. Omana, daughter of Professor Saramma Thomas, Principal of the Chaldean Syrian College, Trichur, was there with her husband Dr. K.I. Varghese. "How come my parents did not write to me about your arrival?" queried Omana. I explained that probably the people in Trichur including her parents did not know that I had gone to the USA, as it was arranged hastily. Another Dr. Varghese whom friends call T. V. was also there. First I was wondering why he was called TV and whether he had worked for the Television. Then I gathered that his initials are TV. Other couples whom I had met in 1988 were Roshni and Ashok George, Jos Anthony & family and Raju & family.

The new ones were Nalini and Unni Menon as well as Dr. K. M. Mathen and Molly Mathen. Dr. Mathen told me that after working for several years in Saudi Arabia he returned to our homestate, Kerala, but he could not find a job as he was overqualified. Nobody wanted an FRCS in ENT department. His father was a clergyman in the Church of South India (former Anglican Church in India). At 70 he is happily settled in San Diego. Both his son and daughter have married Americans. Kerala culture and Malayalam language will be foreign to his grand children. Dr Mathen is typically Keralite. When I played an old classical Indian tune called *Varaveena* on my sitar, he was singing the words.

It was the 27th wedding anniversary of my brother Jos. His wife Lalu claimed that I had specially gone to America to be with them for the wedding anniversary. I had assisted at their wedding in 1964 in the Chaldean Syrian

Big Church, Trichur. Dr. K. I. Varghese wrote a poem in Malayalam and read it to the noisy group that gathered there. I was surprised that he could write beautiful Malayalam even though he was working in Canada and the USA for many years.

Howard Wells

At San Diego I was happy to meet Howard Wells, a pianist who wanted to spend his life as a priest in an eastern Church. He could not meet a bishop of the eastern rite who could help him to fulfil his life's desire. At present he conducts his prayers in the small chapel in his apartment. In 1977 I had visited him when he was staying in his aunt's house. After the death of his aunt he moved to an apartment in San Diego. During my last visit to San Diego in 1988 I telephoned and could hear only his recorded voice. This time it was his real voice at the other end.

Miki, my niece, drove me to his apartment where a lot of old people live. As I was carrying my sitar, the old residents at the apartment were curious. They told us that pianist Howard Wells had just gone out. After waiting for a long time, we decided to return disappointed wondering why my friend had vanished after giving me an appointment. As soon as we walked out to get into our car which was parked one block away, one old lady went and reported to Howard Wells that a stranger was waiting for him. He came running and we were happy to be together for some minutes. I played my sitar. We talked.

He had read in one of my books that I had a hard time to have access to an English translation of the

Bazaar of Heracleides written by Nestorius in Greek language just before his death in 451 A. D. No library in India had this translation and the libraries in England were not willing to loan it overseas. I finally managed to get the personal copy of Professor Henry Chadwick, loaned for a few weeks, by the personal intervention of the Principal of the United Theological College, Bangalore when I was preparing an M. Th. thesis, during my studies there during 1964-66. Howard Wells presented me with the American edition (by AMS Press, New York) of the English translation originally published in Oxford in 1925. He also gave me *The Book of Consolations, Pastoral Letters of Isho Yabh* published in London in 1904 and the American edition published by AMS, New York in 1978. I am grateful to my friends who care for me, who supply books occasionally. It is expensive to buy foreign books. My whole month's salary which is equivalent to US \$52, will not be sufficient to buy one big book or two ordinary books.

On Saturday 11th May we drove to Hughson, near Turlock, in the suburb of San Francisco. I contacted the priest to get the right direction to the Church. Last time we could not find Hughson after we reached Turlock. When we asked for direction, a lady replied Hughson was not in California, Houston was in Texas. This time we had clear direction to reach our destination, i. e., St. Mary's Church, Hughson at Fox Avenue and 7th street.

On the way we had breakfast at the apartment of Mia & Tony. I was impressed how neat and clean this young couple had kept their apartment. The long drive, about 8 hours from San Diego to Hughson was done by three drivers, my brother Jos, his second daughter

Michelle (MIKI) and the submarine man in the family, Tony Katzdorn. The drive was pleasant and we reached the Church exactly at 7 p.m. just to conclude the evening prayer which was going on there.

Rev. Eshai Joseph and Deacon Benyamin were there in the Church. They took us to the parsonage which the Church has rented, just two minutes drive from the Church. The priest Rev. Eshai Joseph lives in his own farm. This parsonage is called Deacon's House because two deacons from Chicago stay there and study. Rev. Eshai Joseph is teaching them Aramaic language and liturgical subjects.

Deacon Odisho and Deacon Edward Bakoz are young deacons and Rev. Eshai Joseph has plans for them to attend the University and obtain a degree. We do not have a Seminary in America. This is the beginning of a theological college where deacons can be trained for higher ranks of clergyhood. We need educated clergy to serve our three parishes in North America, Marth Mariyam in Hughson, St. Odisho Church, in Chicago and Marth Shmonie parish in Toronto, Canada.

After the sumptuous supper prepared by the ladies of our Church, brother's family and I were given the Deacon's House to stay for the night. On Sunday, 12th, I conducted Holy Qurbana. The Church was full. Bishop Mar Daniel, although in bad health for several years, came to the Church to see me.

"Sukamundho?" asked an 87 year old deacon after the service was over and we began the breakfast. It is a Malayalam word for "Are you well?" Deacon Geevarghese

Benyamin was the *Malpan* (Syriac teacher) in Kerala during 1928-1933. Although he left India 58 years ago he had not forgotten Malayalam.

Shirin Kallu will be completing 119 years this July. She was born in Jelu in Turkey. I was happy to see her alive again. When I stayed in the house of Yacob Yacob in 1988 I thought I was seeing the 116 year old for the last time. She is still going strong. She is the elder sister of Yacob Yacob's mother.

Moses T. Moshe and his wife Rajina drove me back. They live in San Bernardino. As I had to go the next day to Arrowhead Springs near their town I accepted the hospitality of the Assyrian home. I was seeing him for the first time; yet we became friends instantly.

New Life 2000

The International Committee of Reference for New Life 2000 had its first meeting at Arrowhead Springs. It is a beautiful campus of the Crusade for Christ International. At present there are only 700 members in this committee which will be expanded to include bishops and lay leaders in the various parts of the world interested in the fulfilment of the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples to preach the gospel to all the nations.

There are some bishops from the Church of South India and the Church of North India on this International Committee. I enquired from one of these bishops whether he had answered positively for this invitation. He replied that he did not know that it was an invitation to the Committee; it looked like an appeal for subscription to the *Life* magazine or *New Life* magazine !

The busy bishops in India usually do not read the photocopy messages in thick envelopes. If it is a handwritten or typed communication, we consider it a letter. The size is also counted. The invitation with the 700 addresses did not appear to be a letter. The first page contained the invitation. When I submitted that letter along with the application for visa, they found that my name did not appear in that invitation. Then I had to submit the long list of 700 persons serving on the committee and I underlined my address. Visa was granted for 5 years without further trouble.

The meeting was well planned. The programme was not crowded. Everybody was in a relaxed mood. There were no resolutions to be passed, or drafts to be prepared by groups sitting late at night. We did not have to produce documents. Dr. Bill Bright, the founder director of the Campus Crusade, was omnipresent with his wife Vonette. Admits Dr. Bright, his wife is more known in the White House, as some people in Washington D. C. whispered "Is he Vonette's Bill Bright?". There is a joke about the wife of the Mayor of Pittsburg, said by Mrs. Bright herself, but I reserve it for my fourth book on humour, to be entitled *Holy Humour* and to be released next year.

Dr. Ted Engstrom, as a Chairman of the New Life 2000, gave leadership to the group. He was a man full of humour. As I showed him the only copy (it is borrowed from my sister, as all the 3000 copies printed by St. Paul's Publications had been sold) of my second book of humour *Laugh with the Bishop* Dr. Engstrom introduced me to the group during lunch hour and invited

me to crack some jokes. I made all of them laugh for a few minutes.

I played my *sitar* the second day during lunch hour. Thus the members of the committee knew me as a satirist as well as *sitarist*. I played for two minutes only as I did not know whether the western audience could appreciate a typical Indian instrument such as *sitar*. Thanks to *maestro* Ravi Shankar, *sitar* is not totally unknown in California.

“Jesus” film based on St. Luke’s gospel has been shown effectively in many parts of the world. Recently in the U. S. S. R. it was shown and it afforded a great opportunity for the religious and moral instruction in that country. Paul Eschleman told us that permission was granted by the Soviet authorities to train the teachers in their schools with the recently prepared literature and *Jesus* film. There are a lot of complications in getting tons of literature and video projectors transported to the Soviet Union. We saw on video how large crowds of Soviet people in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, sat with rapt attention. I am interested in it as I keep contact with the Assyrians in Tbilisi and Moscow. I look forward to visiting these places which I have been seeing on the TV screen.

Kerala Friends

Mathews Mathai, who was working in Trichur for Campus Crusade, is now employed with the U. S. Postal Services. He telephoned to me to state that he would pick me up when the Conference was over and he took me to his home in San Dimas. He could drive me down to the

Los Angeles airport the following day. It was a pleasant surprise to listen to an old friend. He took me to his co-brother (I have written earlier in this book that co-brother is a word in Indian English for brother-in-law, when wives are sisters). Sam Oommen, who lives in Sierra Madre, went to study theology in the U. S. A., probably the same year when I went to study in New York. He stayed on. Although we were meeting for the first time, he knew quite a lot about me already. He presented me with some good books written by Lloyd John Ogilvie *God's Best for My Life, Life Without Limits* and others. Audio Cassettes of the sermons of Dr. Ogilvie were also given to me.

During the evening in the home of Mathai his relatives and friends had gathered. I played my sitar and came out with some jokes from my books. All of them roared with laughter. As the guests had to leave, I reluctantly concluded the session. It was nice to have spent some time with Mathai (called Babu) and his wife Moni with their children Mini and Manoj.

Mathews Mathai wanted to see me off. I insisted that he went home, I could do the check-in on my own. But at the check-in counter I encountered problems. The lady at the counter told me that I could not carry my *sitar* with me, but could be checked through the baggage. The case of the sitar was not wooden as in the previous trip. It was just satin cloth, good looking, but not strong enough to stand the rough handling in the baggage area. Arguing that I was keeping it from India in my lap right through, I insisted that she should be more sensible about it.

"You have to pay \$50" was her second demand. "What for?" I queried. "You advanced the date of the

journey by one day. Therefore it is a service charge or penalty'' was her reply. I was getting impatient. Protested I, ''Why didn't your people tell me this when I telephoned two days ago to make this booking preponing my journey (I am told this Indian usage is not good English) by one day. I would not have made this alteration, if I were told that there would be a penalty of \$50 for travelling one day early by the same flight.''

I paid \$50 when she said, ''Anyhow you cannot fly now. You have no reservation in this flight. I shall think of a later flight in the afternoon.'' She was kind enough to let me travel in that flight, probably because I did not raise my voice further.

At Chicago's O'hare airport, it was a warm reception by Rev. Awiqam Pithyon, Mr. Yonadham and other Assyrians, in spite of the chilly weather outside. I went to the St. Odisho Church and had tea and refreshments with the Assyrians. I joked with the people that my plane reached Chicago exactly at 7 p. m., as we were 7th people, meaning people observing January 7th as Christmas. I ate cakes and other sweets, but tea I took without sugar, being a diabetic !

On 12th May I officiated at the Sunday Qurbana in St. Odisho Church. I had conducted service at the same altar in 1988. The Church was full. The choir of girls sang well. I did not hear the sound of the organ. I played that instrument later in the evening. The gospel lesson was read by me in the modern Syriac understood by all Assyrians. The old liturgical Aramaic in which the rest of the liturgy was celebrated would not be understood

completely by the Assyrians of today. It is the same script. That is why I could read the gospel lesson in the modern Syriac Bible. I preached in English, apologising for not improving my Syriac a bit since I spoke to them in 1988.

Deacon Joseph Zaya of Jelu, who was my interpreter in Sept. 1968 in Bagdad during my consecration, had returned to Syria from Iraq. Now in Chicago he sings in the Church leading the deacons. I was indeed over-joyed to see him after $22\frac{1}{2}$ years. He is 85 years old.

I was happy to see again the American lady married to an Assyrian. She clapped her hands when I started preaching. She stopped instantly as she realised that the Assyrians do not "encourage" a preacher by applause or standing ovation. In one of my joke books I had written the story of a new worshipper in the Church who repeated "Praise the Lord" during the sermon. The ushers told him categorically to stop it, adding. "We do not PRAISE the Lord in this Church."

The Indian children from the Mar Timotheus Orphanage, Trichur, adopted near Chicago, came to see me after the service at breakfast in the Church hall. David Oommen and his wife Lalitha also called on me. Lalitha is the elder sister of my youngest brother-in-law Cherian Poothicote. In 1988 I had visited this family and played piano with their three daughters Manju, Sanju and Premu. This time the busy schedule did not permit a visit to their home.

The choir under the leadership of Mrs. Esmar Mezdo had requested for a half hour with them. I was happy to

with them. Requesting my Indian friends to wait for half an hour, I tried to encourage the choir girls. I told them that the Marth Mariyam Big Church had bought an organ and started a choir. Later Mar Yohannan Samdhana Church bought a better one and has added charm to the Sunday worship.

James Chemmani, the nephew of the late Archdeacon Isaac Enwiya of Daura, Bagdad, wanted to ask some questions. I had known James in London in the house of his cousin Eshaya Chemmani. James collects old Syriac books, makes photocopies and sells them. With that background I thought that he would have some harmless questions. But at one point he said that the girls should not sing in the Church. It is against the Canon law according to him.

Mrs. Esmar Mezdo came the next day and apologised for the inconvenience the "James affair" might have caused to me. She presented me with a "Deluxe Desk set with solar and light power calculator, clock, and newest marker pen." The choir girls had signed a greeting card as an expression of their appreciation for me. I hope that their sonorous voice would reverberate St. Odisho Church for years to come.

Walking through Devon Avenue we saw a lot of Indians. The Thomasulas had reserved a place for us in a good Indian restaurant in Devon Avenue. We all got in there. John and Anne of the Thomasulas, Kala (Margaret) & Ryan of Cindy & Al Parry of Peoria and Reena with Dr. Primal de Lenerolle enjoyed the sumptuous Indian meal. We could choose anything we wanted, vegetarian or non-vegetarian. My favourite

south Indian speciality namely *Dosai* and *Masala Dosa* were there. I took *Iassi* (Yogurt with sugar) the north Indian speciality, when Mrs. Thomasula suggested it, not reminding myself that it was not good for my diabetes. Children wandered around making noise without much interest in food, while we adults were busy with a generous second helping. While I ate fish, the Americans tasted the *Tandoori* chicken, the famous Indian cuisine.

There was an evening dinner in the Church which was filled to the full. The priest told me that they did not announce about this evening dinner earlier, except during the service that morning, because of the space limitation in the Church hall. The Church is on the North Pulaski Road, not far from the Devon Avenue. They have bought the parking lot next door. They are planning to extend the Church either horizontally or vertically.

On Monday I went to the Canadian Consulate for visa. I was glad to get the visa on the same day without much interrogation. They asked me whether my host in Chicago (Rev. Awiqam Pithyon) was related to me or not. They have introduced a visa fee (US \$44, nearly Rs. 900) to visit Canada. It is better to avail the opportunity to the maximum as the visa is restricted to a single entry.

Mr. Yonatham, an active member of our Church, whose personal acquaintance I made during the previous trips, took me around and entertained me to a fish lunch in the Greek restaurant. Food was expensive, but tasty.

Margaret Baba Paul is an old Assyrian lady with whom I had stayed during my visit to Chicago in 1967.

telephoned to her. She told me, "You know my problem. It is loneliness." There are many old people in our society who live a lonely life. They share the same problem. They have plenty of time and no work. I do not know how to solve the problem. On the other hand, I have plenty of work and not enough time to execute it efficiently.

I telephoned to her son Alex Paul. During my previous visit in 1988 I had gone with Alex to Margaret's home. But after talking with Margaret, there was no time to go to Alex's. Therefore I went to Alex's house this time. I was happy to meet his wife and three boys. I had met the boys in 1977. They were not born when I stayed with them in 1967. The eldest child of Alex, Ruth, works as a nurse in California.

My stay in Chicago this time was in the house of the priest, Rev. Awiqam Pithyon who was a student in our seminary in India in 1968. He bought a house near the church. In 1988 I had stayed with Mar Narsai Metropolitan of Kirkuk in a rented apartment opposite the Church. It was nice to get acquainted with the family of Rev. Awiqam.

My Chicago to Toronto ticket was changed to Chicago to Columbus, Ohio which is shorter. I thought that I would not have to pay the penalty of \$50 again as I had in Los Angeles. I was, however, made to pay another dollar 50 penalty, because I did not make this change 3 days ago when I advanced a day in Los Angeles. This is done because it was duplication of work for them. I could have made both the changes or even three times a time for one penalty of dollar 50.

Leela, my elder sister, was at the airport. Her husband Dr. Alexander V. Alex is professor of Economics at Portsmouth, more than an hour's drive from Columbus. Their son Dr. Saje is interested in preventive medicine.

The American youngsters are hard working contrary to the estimate of some of us who have seen the hippies wandering along the streets in India. Asha, the 21 year old daughter of my sister Leela, is a very dedicated young student. Quoted below is what she wrote about her summer vacation and gave to me to be handed over to my mother:

I have summer vacation now and I'm working full-time now. I am doing research for the government. I enjoy it a lot. My studies are going well. I'm taking a double major—biology & history. I'm very involved in politics at school. I also do a lot of volunteer work. I tutor inmates at the local jail. I work at the homeless shelter and I teach horseback riding to children who are mentally or physically retarded. I would really like to do some social work before I do my graduate studies. I don't think mum and dad want me to do it though. I haven't decided what I want to do yet. I think I will do law with concentration in education or social work. I'm also still considering medicine. I will decide within a few months.

Babu Konikara is a professor from Trichur who lives in Columbus, Ohio. During my trip in 1984, he came to my brother Addison who was then living in Chillicothe. Babu, the youngest son of the late Revd. Poul

Konikara, Administrator of our Church in India after the sad demise of Mar Timotheus Metropolitan on 30 April 1945, is a born musician, a fine pianist.

Dr. Davy Emmatty lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. My sister Leela drove me to Davy's home on our way to my brother Addison. It was nice to spend an hour with Davy, Gracy and their children Anil and Liza. Dr. Davy is an expert on tomatoes. It being the planting season, he was busy. Yet he found time to talk with me. Such occasions do not occur often.

From Bowling Green it is more than an hour to Saline near Ann Arbor where my younger brother (He is No 8 while I am No. 4 in the family) lives. His wife Molly is now employed full time. Their son Aprem is the only one in our family who is named after me. The daughter, Grace Mary, not yet five, says that she does not remember me.

Addison drove me across the Canadian border. Then at Winsor he put me in the train going to Toronto with a change at London. I spent an hour and a quarter at London to change into the Amtrack train going from Chicago to Toronto. There I had the company of Engineer Wilson Padavan, son of Isaac Master of Trichur, who works as Manager—Trunk Prov. at Bell Telephone Company.

When I reached Brampton near Toronto Rev. Diodorous Mukhti and Mr. Awickam amongst others received me. After supper at the priest's house in Mississauga Awickam took me to his house in Hamilton. Awi's youngest daughter Miriam, aged 5, began to sing Jingle Bells, when I played that tune on my sitar.

From Hamilton Wilson Padavan drove me to his home in London. During my 1977 visit I had stayed in his apartment. But now Wilson and Sicily with their children Donna and Deen stay in a bigger house built to his own design. Sicily, who is a priest's daughter, teaches in the University. Kerala friends had gathered in his house that evening at short notice. Jokes and sitar were always on the agenda in these gatherings. I had bath for the first time in the whirlpool known as Jacuzzi in Wilson's house. I telephoned to my friends of Jabalpur days in the late 50's—Dr. P. M. Thomas, Dr. Daniel Thomas and Fr. P. K. Mathew. Dr. P. M. Thomas met me at Hamilton early morning the next day but Dr. Daniel Thomas could not meet me as he lived some 400 kms away. He insisted that I should spend at least two days in his hometown Montreal, during my next trip to Canada.

On 25th May I had dinner with my second cousin, Chinnan Mookan. Many Kerala friends were guests there, for dinner. Mr. P. T. Philip, whom I had not seen for 33 years tried to test my capacity to remember. He left Jabalpur in 1958 when I was studying for B. D. there. Dr. Nishi Kurien, whom I had known when she was a small girl in Bangalore, was delighted to see me. She attended qurbana the next day and was also at the airport to see me off the following morning.

The Sunday Qurbana on May 26th at the Ukrainian Catholic Church was attended by the Assyrians and the Indians. Some Assyrians were seeing me for the first time. Others had seen me in Bagdad in 1968 or 1977 or 1984. Rev. Diyodoros Mukhti is the son of late Rev. Mukhatash from the village of Mar Beesho, the birth place

of the late Mar Abimalek Timotheus Metropolitan. After the death of Rev. Mukhatash, his son Diyodoros became a deacon in 1948. Having served the Church for forty years he became a priest for Toronto. He conducts service in Hamilton too, in the Episcopal Church. Thus the Ontario parish has two branches, one in Toronto and the other in Hamilton. They do not have a Church building of their own. Yet they hope that their dream will come true if they work in unity and make a little sacrifice.

Sunny Nellangara's house became the venue for the gathering of the Indian group that afternoon. I talked and prayed in Malayalam, our mother tongue. Tony Emmatty & family, the Palissery brothers and their families, the families of my brother Addison and sister Leela, were all there.

Assyrians were gathered in five groups in their areas to make it convenient for me to meet all of them. I was happy to visit Patriarch Mar Adhai's brother whom I had met in Bagdad and his sister Nazi and her husband whom I had met in Rome in 1985. I also visited the house of Gajji of Jelu tribe who used to be seen in the company of another Jelu member, Mr. Pilathos, in 1968, in Bagdad.

On Monday 27th I started my return journey from Chinnan Mookan House. While changing flights in Los Angeles, my brother Jose Mookan and family were waiting with the photos taken two weeks earlier.

Flying from Los Angeles to Hong Kong we crossed the date line. After spending the night at Hong Kong, when I reached Madras, via Singapore it was Wednesday 29th night. Fatigued by a long journey, I slept on the floor of the airport eager to catch the morning flight to Cochin,

CONCLUSION

The release of this autobiography was delayed because of my North American trip in May 1991. All the chapters except the final one, which is in the nature of a travelogue, were written and printed before I left India. The chapter *California to Canada* was written after my return. There was no time to write during the busy schedule abroad.

The readers of this autobiographical work will have diverse reactions. Looking at this work, myself, I fail to arrive succinctly at the special message of this work. What I have been trying to do is to reveal myself, (my thoughts, actions, prejudices, shortcomings and what not) through the pages of this work. Instead of giving undue importance to my own thoughts and actions, I have quoted quite liberally from writers, both sacred and secular. One reaction likely to arise from my friends is that I have written on many mundane matters in this work and that these pages could have been put to better use. Tastes differ.

I was in Columbus, Ohio when my sister's son Dr. Saje telephoned to say that Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. It was about 2 O'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday 21 May. We switched on the CNN channel on TV and saw President Bush and other American leaders expressing their shock at that dastardly act. Since it was day time the news spread fast in the USA. But in India it was night and many Indians slept well unaware of the brutal murder of a great leader.

Pope John Paul I, who died of a heart attack on 29 September 1978 (that day is significant to me, as it was the tenth anniversary of my consecration as a Metropolitan), is a man of precious memory to many of us in this generation. Although he was Pope only for 34 days and 8 hours, he is remembered for his wit. He addressed a letter to Mark Twain before he became a Pope:

“I fear that the faithful of my diocese would be scandalized: ‘A bishop who quotes Mark Twain!’ Perhaps one should explain to them that just as books vary from one to the other, so too do bishops. Some bishops, in fact, resemble eagles, who sail loftily with solemn documents. Others are nightingales who sing marvellously the praises of the Lord. Others, instead, are poor wrens, who only twitter as they seek to express a few thoughts on extremely profound subjects. I, dear Twain, belong to the latter category.”

Mark Twain, the American novelist and satirist, whose real name was Samuel Langhorn Clemens, was dead and gone in 1910. Pope John Paul I wrote the above letter much later. I hope that the faithful of my diocese will not be scandalised by my writing this book, for combining humour with piety and culling from sacred and secular literature in this autobiographical work. It may sound strange to some. I say *Not So Strange*.

Detailed Outline

INTRODUCTION pp. 12-16

Arthur Koestler. *Arrow in the Blue. Not So Strange* 38th book. Autobiography of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Autobiography of Dr. A. A. Sandhosham. Thanks to Dr. Jonathan Sanford.

Chapter 1 My Writing Career pp. 17-52

Thirty seven books. Barbara Cartland 530 novels. Guinness Book. Youel A. Baba. 100th book. Dr. Hubert Kaufhold. Professor Wolfgang Hage. My books published from 1980-1990. Excerpts from the Foreword of different authors. Dr. K. Gopalan. Dr. Karl Heinz Kuhlmann. Dr. Joseph Kolengadan. Dr. M. J. Joseph. Dr. Dayanandan Francis. Mr. P. Thomas. Ambassador Joseph Kallukaren. Writing articles for Journals. Malayalam edition. Syriac edition in Chicago by Deacon G. S. Benjamin. Reprint. Freelance writing. Pope John Paul I. "*Rape of Kuwait.*" *Armageddon etc. The Late Great Planet Earth. Assyrians in Iraq. Sobornost.* Dr. Sebastian Brock. Pronunciation of English language. "Sh" for 'S' in Calcutta.

Laurence Durrell: Foreword by Leonard Henderson. Foreword by Dr. Sukumar Azhicode. Book Review in *Deepika* by Prof. K. M. Mathew. *southern Chronicle* by Philip Mathew. *N. C. C. Review* by Dr. G. R. Singh. *The Anglican Catholic* by John Harwood. Russians in the U. S. S. R. Letter of Dr. K. P. Matveyev. Russian translation of *Laugh With the Bishop.* Dr. Klaus J. Dippmann. Julian Calendar. Thesaurus meaning on ingenuousness and ingeniousness.

Chapter 2 My Trips Abroad pp. 53-68

Average less than one in an year since 1977. Pattaya. Germany. Death of Rev. C. G. David in the air. Amsterdam Conference. Oriental Canon Law Conference in Germany. Sweden. Dr. Bertil Persson. Deacon Jos Vengassery. Mr. Ferine, Leprosy Relief Work in Berne. Ignatius Konikara, Zurich. Swiss Banks. Bofors. England. Qurbana in Ealing, London. Synod in Bagdad. Syriac Symposium in Holland. Qurbana in Sweden. Syriac song of Deacon Sarkis Poulos. Qurbana in Chicago. Visit to California. Jefferson City. Chillicothe. Pilgrimage to Israel & Rome. Tour Conductor. Moses Joke. Meeting Pope John Paul II. Vatican Radio. Visit to Melbourne (1987). Visit to England, U. S. A., Belgium & Holland (1988). Trip to Sydney (1989). Supreme Court. Synod in Bagdad (1990). Vienna and Germany (1990.)

13 trips in 14 years. Making friends. Keralites in Kuwait, America etc. The Moving American. Sarmiento. Longfellow. George Pierson. Wordsworth. Seneca. War. K. P. S. Menon. Billions on vacation and travel. "Expired" in address. American slang on "go". American. Thesaurus on Slang. Automotive civilization in the U. S. A.

Chapter 3 Jack of all trades pp. 69-81

Jack-of-all-trades. SPAN. Vulgar language. Mrs. Kamala Das. Mr. K.P.S. Menon. *Many Worlds Revisited*. Dr. T. M. Nair. Mrs. Anie Besant. Nikita Krushchev. Stalin. Tito. Hindu lady. My Birthday. E. M. S. Nampoodiripad. My beard. Bhindranwale. Chandra-swami. Social contact. Archbishop Angelo Fernandes. Dalai Lama of Tibet.

Chapter 4 With a funny bone pp. 82-98

Three joke books. Thousand and one jokes. Preacher with a funny bone. *The Joyful Christ* by Cal Samra. Christian Clowns. Three talks on humour in a Retreat. Union Christian College, Alwaye. Malcolm Muggeridge. Joyful Noiseletter. Dr. Sandhosham. Foreword by Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom. Gulf War jokes. Joke about Dr. Sandhosham.

Chapter 5 Musings on Music pp. 99-108

My habit of singing. Rev. Jeffrey L. Cotter's opinion. Some improvement. Learning harmonium at Jabalpur. Sitar. Ravi Shankar. Casio PT-100. *Ud* bought in Bagdad. Book on *Ud* from Vienna. Beethoven. Deafness. Writing songs in Malayalam. Translation into 103 languages. Singing in several languages. Memorising songs. Lata Mangeshkar. Guinness Book of World Records. Christian Devotional Songs. Mrs. Fanny Crosby. Mr. Charles Wesley. Rappai: Over-eating record.

Chapter 6 For Social Causes pp. 109-125

Not only rituals. Jesus fed 4000 and 5000 men. Social service. Thrust on development. C A S A. Borewells. Mar Timotheus Birth Centenary Technical Training Centre. Clergy conference in the Syrian Orthodox Church. Killer cyclone in Andhra on Nov 17, 1977. Rural re-construction. Financial control over foreign funding. Admitting failures of projects. CASA Consultation. 4000 Sewing Machines. Debtor for five million rupees. Housing loans. Low cost houses costing Rs. 6000 only. Leprosy Hospital. Mr. Ferine in Leprosy Relief Work, Berne, Switzerland. Mr. William

Gershon. Mr. Rossenfeld. Change of location of windows in the hospital building. Joke on leprosy. My song on leprosy. Small is ideal hospital. CMC, Vellore. St. John's Medical College, Bangalore. Fr. Percival Fernandes. Laugh To Good Health. Caring and Curing. (SPAN, March 1991).

Chapter 7 Reminiscences pp. 126-151

Anecdotes from childhood. K. P. S. Menon. My reading of Korean war in 1950. Uncle Dr. P. A. Paul in the IInd World War. Reading books. Poems of Claude McKay. America. A Memory of June. Paul T. Varghese. clippings. Marking in the margins. Pasting in the diaries. Standard of reading and comprehension capacity. My article selected for Computer Corpus of Shivaji University. Dr. Downs, Editor of the Indian Church History Review. Dr. Kaaj Baago, later Danish ambassador to India. My archaic English. Flutist and Flautist. Brother-in-law not co-brother. Jawaharlal Nehru's impression of the British. Drinking. Friends' drinking. My temperance. Talking back. Quotation from Richard Blummer. Statement by Derek Rutherford about evils and disasters of drinking. Illicit liquor in India. Prohibition not very successful in India. Indians free from the British, but not free from the bottle. Supreme blunder. Church case appeal in the Supreme Court in Delhi. Going to High Court in Delhi by mistake. Finally appearing at the door of the Supreme Court. Colour of my cassock. PROBE Magazine. Interview by a lady. Saree of my sisters. Poem on colours. Without TV. Comment in the Illustrated Weekly of India. Memoirs of President Truman. The busy schedule of the President of the United States of America. Dinner with Stalin & Churchill. Guinness Book of World Records. Longest Biography of Churchill. Twenty two

autobiographical works of Georges Simenon. Graham Greene. A Sort of life. John Updike. Pulitzer Prize. Present Tense.

Chapter 8 Church Administration pp. 152-171

Not strict. Taskmaster. Mar Thoma Darmo. Memorandum of the clergy. Fortunately no relatives among the clergy, neither in the past nor in the present. Clergy versus laity. Bishop Isho Mar Timotheus. Clergy Conference. My priest's remark. Retort by Isho Mar Timotheus. Comment of Gary Hart. The neglected women. Ordination of women. Lambeth Conference. Women bishops. The frustrated youth. The National Council of Churches. Youth Assembly in April 1991. *Gerundophobia*. Address by Dr. Anil Wilson. Representative Council of the Church. CASA meetings in Delhi. Soviet Parliament. Slander. *New Times*. *Perestroika*. The efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev to bring openness and change in the U. S. S. R. Mrs. Raisa Gorbacheva. Pope's visit.

Chapter 9 Personal pp. 172-191

Friends. Long telephone calls. School & College mates. No family worries about daughter's wedding. Ralph R. Keithahn's memoir *Pilgrimage to India*. Harmless gambling. Yes-men in the Church. Guidance of the Holy Spirit. A lady 'nut'. Single parents. Princeton *Alumni/ae News*. Singles adopting children. *Gardening*. Fruit tress, vegetables, flowers. Ralph Waldo Emerson. Hippies. Flower children. Mrs. Maneka Gandhi. Stress on life, SPAN, April 1991. Rachel Kaplan. Ecology of our planet earth. *Taking Rest*. Bilquis Sheikh. Deputy

Prime Minister Devilal. No rest for politicians. Forced rest for me due to some slight sickness every six months. *Sycophancy*. Joke on humility. Mar Aprem without titles. Most Rev. Sr. Mar Aprem. Ma Prem. Acharya Rajaneesh. Jabalpur, *Mar* means My Lord. All These Years. *A Memoir* by Raj Thapar. Recommendation for school admissions and jobs. Friends abroad.

Chapter 10 Awards pp. 192-197

Men of Achievement 1984. International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England. Receptions in Trichur. Vice Chancellor, Cochin University. Chief Minister of Kerala. Reception in Madras. Rotary Literary Award 1990 Rs. 1000. Reception in West Nadakavu parish. Author of the Year for English books. Express Weekly editorial article. I. S. P. C. K. writing competition. First Prize Rs. 1500. Challenge to write better and more.

Chapter 11 California to Canada pp. 198-219

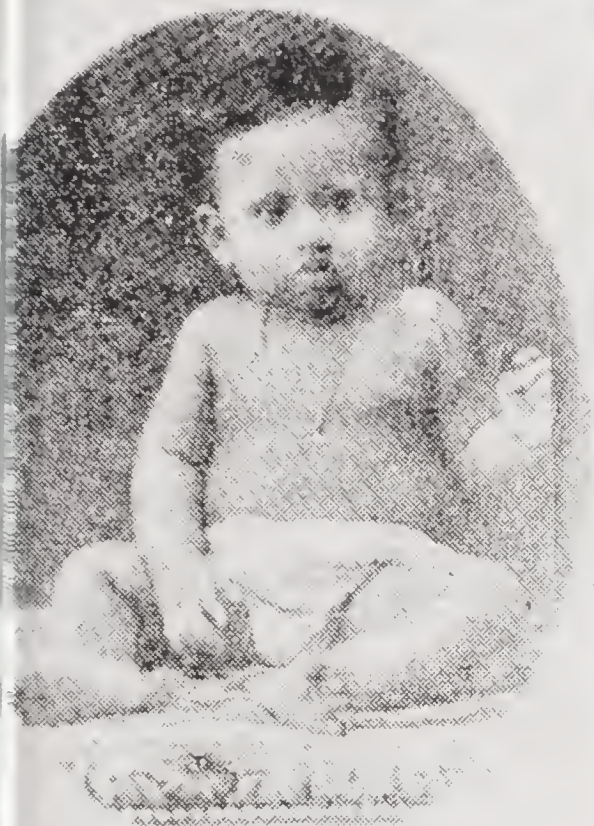
Quick trip via Singapore & HongKong without Raptim subsidy. Five years visa to the U. S. A. Reluctance to issue visa in 1984. 8th May leaving Trichur by train. Reaching Los Angeles on the 9th. Suitcase in open condition. Jose Mookan waiting for me at the airport. Tony Katzdorn. Kerala friends. Omana & Dr. K. I. Varghese, Dr. K. M. Mathen, Jos Anthony & family. Nalini & Unni Menon. Playing sitar. 27th wedding anniversary. Howard Wells. *Bazaar of Heracleides* written by Nestorius. 11th May going to Hughson near Turlock. Revd. Eshai Joseph & Deacon Ben Benjamin. Stay at Deacons' House. Sunday service at St. Mary's Church. Deacon Geevarghese Benjamin Malpan in India

(1928-1933) speaking Malayalam words. Moses Moshi. San Bernadino.

New Life 2000. Dr. Bill Bright. Vonette. Dr. Ted Engstrom. Jokes. Sitar. Jesus film in USSR. Mathews Mathai. Sam Oommen. Books by Lloyd Oglivie. American Airlines flight. \$ 50 penalty for advancing one day. Rev. Awiqam Pithyon. Mr. Yonatham and other Assyrian friends. Qurbana on 19th at St. Odisho Church. Deacon Joseph Zaya of Jelu. Breakfast. David Oomen & Lalitha. Meeting with the choir. Mrs. Esmar Mezdo. Women in the Church. James Chemmani. Indian children from Mar Timotheus Memorial Orphanage. Dinner at Indian Restaurant in Devon Avenue. Evening Dinner in the Church. Visa at the Canadian Consulate. Lunch at the Greek Restaurant. Telephone to Margaret Baba Paul. Visit to Alex, Jackie and their three boys. Stay with Rev. Awiqam. Flight to Columbus, Ohio. Leela and Alexander Alex. Dr. Saje. Asha. Babu Konikara. Dr. Davy Emmatty. Addision & Molly Mookan. Aprem. Grace Mary. Drive across Canadian border. Train to Toronto. Received by Rev. Diodoros Mukhti, Awiqam and others. Supper at Rev. Mukhti. Stay at Awi's house. Stay with Wilson Padavan at London. Kerala friends. Sitar and jokes. 25th May at Chinnan Mookan. Friends for dinner. Nishi Kurian. Sunday Qurbana on 26th May at the Ukranian Catholic Church in Toronto. Trichur group. Visit to Assyrian homes. Patriarch's younger brother & sister's family. Return from Toronto to Los Angeles. Again Jose Mookan & family. Halt at Hong Kong. Loss of one day. Singapore & Madras.

Conclusion pp. 220-221

Rajiv Gandhi. Pope John Paul I.



Mar Aprem aged $\frac{1}{2}$ Year



Aged 21 Years



Author's mother's mother with his cousins Ramani and Valsa



Indian children adopted in Chicago



With Rev. Diyoros Mukhti and deacon in Canada



Mar Aprem with his mother and mother's father



Arrowhead Springs. 15 May 1991.

Mar Aprem with Dr. Bill Bright, President of Campus Crusade
for Christ International



Brother's family in San Diago. Lalu, Miki, Tony, Jose, Miriam



Wilson Padavan family with Mar Aprem
In London, Canada, 25 May 1991,



Columbus, Ohio. 22 May 1991. Sister's family
Left to Right. Dr. Saje Alex, Mrs. Leela Alex,
Prof. Alexandar Alex



With Chief Minister Karunakaran and his three Cabinet
Ministers at Big Church, Trichur in 1986,





Chicago : Rev. Awiqam Pithyon and his wife Martha with their son Pithyon and daughters Linda (right) and Klara the youngest.

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Turlock : 119 year old Shirin Kallu. Behind her is the wife of Yacob S. Yacob. On Mar Aprem's left is Yacob in the wheel chair (12 May 1991).

Hughson: Deacon Odisho on the left of Mar Aprem. Two members of the Marth Mariyam Church Committee Mr. Behram Behrami (seated) and Mike Purto.



With Pope John Paul II at Vatican in May 1985



Kerala friends in San Dimas, California

(continued from Title Page 2)

Humour

- 27. Bishop's Jokes pp. 108, 1983
- 28. Laugh with the Bishop pp. 95, 1988
- 29. Laugh To Health (C. L. S., Madras) 1991

General

- 30. From Relief to Development: A Profile
of CASA pp. 272, 1979
- 31. Teach Yourself Aramaic pp. 152, 1981
- 32. Behold the Cross of Calvary pp. 152, 1987
- 33. Sermons from the Gospels. Vol. I pp. 208, 1988
- 34. Sermons from the Gospels. Vol. II pp. 138, 1990

Malayalam

- 35. An Introduction to the History of the
Eastern Churches (Reprint, 1990) pp. 196, 1976
- 36. Christeeya Bakthi Ganangal pp. 124, 1980
- 37. സഭാ ചരിത്ര നിഘണ്ടു (ed.) pp. 424, 1985
- 38. ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ കാൽപ്പാടുകളിലൂടെ pp. 168, 1985

TO BE PUBLISHED (1991-92)

- 39. Nestorian Canon Law
- 40. Assyrian Fathers
- 41. Assyrian Manuscripts in India
- 42. Poems & Prayers
- 43. Advanced Aramaic
- 44. Voices of the East (editorials)
- 45. Holy Humour

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Most. Rev. Dr. Mar Aprem (formerly George Mookken) was born in Trichur, Kerala, India, in June 1940. Educated in India, England and America, he specialised in the field of Church History. He was the President of the Church History Association of India.

He holds two master's degrees in Church History, one from the United Theological College Bangalore (M. Th, of Serampore, 1966), and the other from the Union Theological Seminary, New York (S. T. M. degree, 1967). He was a candidate for Doctor of Theology (Th. D.) degree at Princeton Theological Seminary, USA when he was made bishop in Bagdad, Iraq in 1968. Later he earned his D. Th. degree from Serampore University near Calcutta.

Ordained a deacon on June 25, 1961 he became a priest on the day he completed twenty five years of age on 13 June 1965. He was consecrated bishop on September 21, 1968 by Mar Thoma Darmo and promoted as a Metropolitan eight days later at Bagdad.

His biography appears in the *International Who's Who of Intellectuals*, Vol. 6, Cambridge, The *International Directory of Distinguished Leadership*, First Edition, U. S. A. and others.

He was given 'Men of Achievement' Award of the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England in 1984 and the 'Medal of Merit' of the Coptic Orthodox Cultural Centre, Venice for his cultural and ecumenical achievements.

Since 1968 he is the head of the Church of the East in India with his headquarters in Trichur. He is active in several religious and social organizations, all over India.